

Understanding Emerging Landscapes

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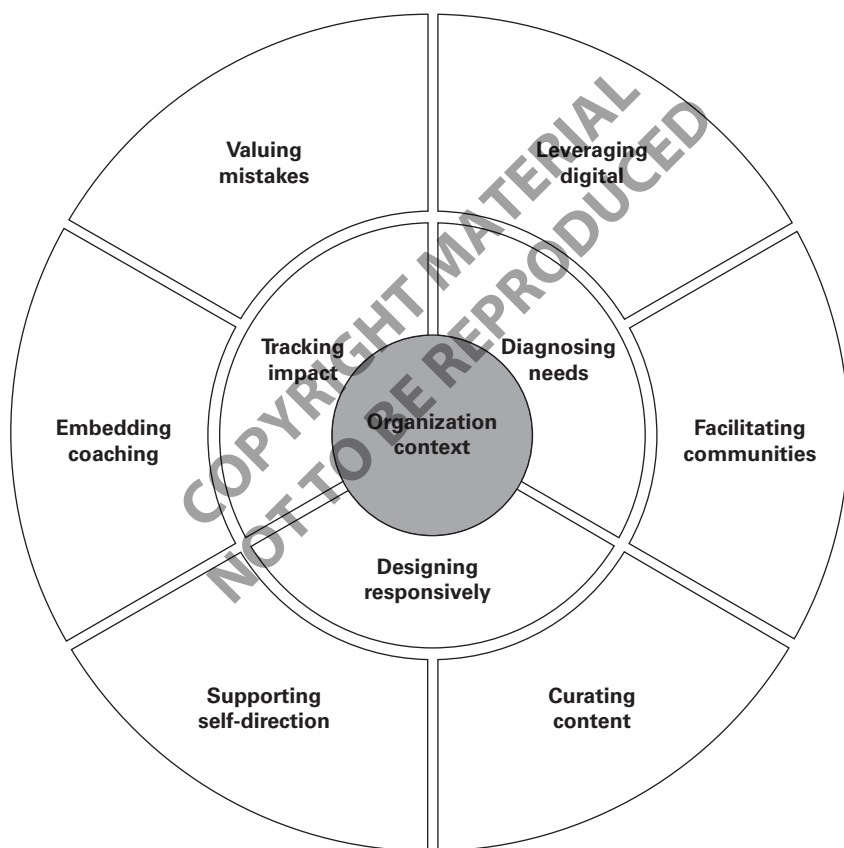
Redefining workplace learning



Where are we heading?

The very nature of work, the workforce and the workplace is being transformed. While contexts are unique, this chapter begins by defining common changes across organizations that are reshaping the nature of learning. The prevailing culture of staff development being about courses is now outdated and ineffective; we must redefine workplace learning. Back in 1990, Peter Senge wrote the best-selling book *The Fifth Discipline* and introduced the concept of a 'learning organization'. Sadly, few organizations realized this

worthy ambition. However, over a quarter of a century on, this chapter explores research that defines the characteristics of successful new, emerging learning organizations. Moreover, in redefining workplace learning, the concepts of ‘work is learning, learning is work’ and ‘learning in-the-flow of work’ are introduced, together with the need to get beyond the fixed percentages of the 70:20:10 learning model to an appropriate blend of experiential, social and formal learning. To conclude, the chapter addresses the challenge of differing views within organizations of what learning is and the need to develop a shared organizational ‘learning philosophy’. Practical steps are outlined on how to establish a new vision and common expectation of how learning is delivered in a future-focused organization.



The emerging organizational landscape

Lewis Carroll was not regarded as a futurologist. An author, yes, but he wasn't known for his visionary insight. However, in writing the Red Queen's race in *Through the Looking Glass* in 1871 he seems to have glimpsed a vision of our increasingly fast-changing world:

‘Well, in our country,’ said Alice, still panting a little, ‘you’d generally get to somewhere else – if you run very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.’ ‘A slow sort of country!’ said the Queen. ‘Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!’

Running fast to stand still: most of us can relate to that challenge. From this fictional scenario the ‘Red Queen hypothesis’ was derived (Van Valen, 1974), which states that organisms must constantly evolve to survive in an ever-changing world, pitted against other transforming organisms. The context for the hypothesis is one of predator, prey and extinction in the natural world. Evolve or die. That may sound dramatic, but it’s an apt description of organizational life in our contemporary world. Whatever the sector, new approaches are disrupting and challenging the relevance and existence of organizations. Transformation isn’t an option. As often quoted, and incidentally not from Charles Darwin: ‘... it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself’ (Megginson, 1963).

Organizations must change, and for that to happen, learning functions, as key facilitators in that process, must also change. The two transformations are inextricably linked. No longer can we accept a traditional learning model in which formal courses are seen as the primary means for effective learning. While each context has unique elements, there are common emerging organizational traits that are demanding the redefinition of learning approaches. In defining these changes, it helps to use three lenses: work, the workforce and the workplace.

Work

The nature of work is rapidly changing on many levels. Well-established business and operational models are being disrupted; past methods and achievements no longer guarantee future success; in fact, they can be a hindrance. The rate of change makes medium- and long-term planning difficult, if not impossible. The day of the five-year strategic plan has gone. Resourcing decisions must be more reactive in shorter forecast cycles.

Organizations operate in increasingly competitive and disrupted scenarios that demand improved performance, productivity and innovation. The need for efficiency drives leaner operations, with reduced budgets and increased margins. Providers and suppliers must provide quality services in increasingly challenging markets with more demanding contracts and customers. Decisions in product development must be more agile, with rapid prototyping and ‘test and learn’ approaches; the availability of immediate feedback reduces timespans. Performance and productivity improvements are an expectation no matter what sector you work in.

Decision making is driven by Big Data and analytics with complex insights available. The quality and quantity of available data provide the possibility

of advantage; without relevant timely information, services are impaired and a competitive edge lost. The HiPPO (Highest-Paid Person's Opinion) is less influential, and previous expertise, which stood the organization in good stead, may be outdated. In a data-driven world, intuition counts for little, if anything. Whereas a premium was previously placed on skills, the shift is now to a knowledge economy, with information, insights and influencers becoming increasingly valuable.

Organizations are a part of complex ecosystems that influence their customer base, supply chain and success. Globalization creates opportunities and challenges as organizations operate in diverse markets, across multiple time-zones and beyond traditional boundaries. National and global economic, political, legal and social factors have seismic implications for decision making and future planning. Reputations, even longstanding, can be quickly damaged with in-the-moment information sharing on social media channels.

Customers interact in diverse ways, with increasing demands for online exchanges and an expectation of rapid responses. Time is of the essence; few customers will tolerate slow service delivery. Stakeholders and customers also require organizations to be 'greener', with a more sustainable approach. These demand advances in new technologies and processes and reductions in carbon footprints.

Relentless technological innovation and disruption influence products, processes and practices, with high-speed mobile internet, artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud technology being key drivers of change. The internet of things, smart devices and apps redefine customer interfaces, and augmented and virtual reality provides new ways to showcase and access products and services. Organizations anticipate greater human-machine interactions, with automation and robotics undertaking an increasing proportion of repetitive and transactional tasks. This has an impact on workforce roles, with reductions in some jobs but the creation of new ones.

The emerging world of work demands new approaches to learning. What does this mean for learning and work?

- The pace of change in work demands responsive learning solutions that have a direct impact on performance.
- Learning needs must be driven by organizational goals and performance needs, informed by data and metrics.
- With organizations being more complex ecosystems, with staff in diverse locations, learning must be available anytime, anywhere.
- Technology-enabled organizations with high-speed internet, smart devices, augmented and virtual reality and human-machine interactions set the context for increasingly digitally delivered learning opportunities.
- With organizations requiring greater sustainability and smaller carbon footprints, learning should be sustainable, with considerations for resource use and minimized travel.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

Review the following quotes, which provide perspectives on the emerging nature of work. What implications does each one have for learning in your scenario?

Organizations resist innovation – and those that do inevitably fail – because people are more comfortable with what they know than with what they don't.

Michael Bloomberg, American businessman, politician and previous Mayor of New York (Brown, 2017)

There is nothing like a concrete plan to weigh you down. Because if you always have one eye on some future goal, you stop paying attention to the job at hand, miss opportunities that might arise, and stay fixedly on one path, even when a better, newer course might have opened up.

Indra K Nooyi, Former CEO of Pepsi Co (Kaplan, 2017)

Today customers can tell whether product and service is good because there's so much transparency.

Jeff Bezos, Amazon (Brown, 2017)

Workforce

The very nature of the workforce is changing. Organizations have a greater generational range of workers than at any time in history; this raises opportunities and challenges. While terms such as 'baby boomers', 'millennials', 'Gen-X, Y and Z' (Dimock, 2019) and 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) are unhelpful, sweeping, overused stereotypes, we must acknowledge that differences exist, although not commonly across whole age groups.

At one time, full-time work was the norm and for many the most desirable employment status. Now organizations have full-time and part-time workers, those with flexible working hours and shared work arrangements. Some organizations rely on contract or 'gig' workers for projects and specialist roles.

Career transition is more frequent, and organizations must cope with a constantly evolving workforce. Rather than a career being seen as upward moving, employees will move sideways, taking their skills into other sectors and tapping into opportunities found in networks. Organizations of choice

will offer career as well as role-specific learning. Our grandparents typically had one or two jobs in their lifetime; now it will be commonplace to have over ten.

People are living longer; we have an increasingly ageing workforce, with many having to or choosing to work beyond what was previously considered a normal retirement age. In the future, will there actually be a retirement age and how will employers manage the needs and aspirations of older workers? The concept of the '100-year life' has emerged and so has the need to think about the construction of our personal futures differently (Gratton and Scott, 2018). Workforce diversity, in all aspects, is vital for effective and inclusive workforces that drive a competitive edge.

Knowledge and skills are rapidly changing, creating a challenge for workforce planning, recruitment, training, learning and development. Whereas role-specific skills were previously most sought after, the transitioning nature of work means that soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, communication, empathy, collaboration, team working, creativity, critical thinking and negotiation skills, are of increasing importance. Excellent 'people people' are vital.

We may know what skills are needed now; however, defining the workforce needs of the future is almost impossible. New emerging roles will create a challenge for recruitment and traditional pay structures; those with the unique, sought-after new skills will come at a price.

Reskilling is a reality for all. Gone are the days when you trained and qualified in your early career for good; ongoing lifelong learning will be the norm. Employers of choice will have a comprehensive staff development programme not only for role-related skills but also for wider career and life skills.

The impacts of disruptive technology such as AI, automation and robotics will influence jobs; some will become redundant but new ones will be created. There is a challenge as to how technology will be integrated effectively into human work.

Questions are increasingly asked about the value of traditional education routes to work, which fail to deliver work-ready staff. Costly higher education often fails to provide a return for the years spent in study, and in-work development programmes, such as apprenticeships, are becoming increasingly attractive to many employers and future employees.

Whereas a 'command and control' management approach was once an accepted norm, staff now expect fewer hierarchical structures and more connection, collaboration and consultation. Managers and leaders must inspire staff, be values driven and people focused, instil a sense of ownership and welcome contributions. Old performance management methods, such as the annual appraisal, are being proven to be arduous and ineffective; however, there is a challenge as to how to sharpen the workforce to deliver in increasingly competitive environments.

As organizations work in an increasing information economy, some of the most valuable assets lie 'within' staff; knowledge and networks are owned by the individual, not the company.

Staff have higher demands. They take an interest in the values and reputation of an organization in their career choices; negative PR, poor practices and breaches of integrity label organizations as toxic employers. Considerable power has shifted from the organization to the employee. The reality and quality of the working experience, from the perspective of employees, can be readily found online, with companies being held to account for their culture, working environment and management practice. Who are we more likely to believe: staff members who have taken time to post honest reflections about their work experience online, albeit some have an ‘axe to grind’, or generic, mildly apologetic or defensive management responses?

Staff are desperately trying to manage complex lives and crave work–life balance; stressful jobs that demand long hours are becoming less unappealing. Salary is no longer the key motivator for many; the most valued rewards now include development opportunities, a general good experience at work, health and well-being, and flexible working. Individual aspirations matter, with the need to provide staff with some autonomy and self-direction in their work and career progression.

The emerging workforce demands new approaches to learning. What does this mean for learning and the workforce?

- Multigenerational workforces demand a range of learning approaches, with digital solutions being important as they are an integral part of everyday life.
- The range of full-time, part-time, flexible, contract or ‘gig’ workers requires flexible learning options.
- While role-specific skills remain important, there is a greater need for soft skills, providing the opportunity for generic workforce learning themes.
- With a more transient workforce, organizations will need to consider their commitment to development; self-directed, autonomous, career learning will be important in addition to role support.
- L&D will be a key ‘value add’ expected by the workforce.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

Review the following quotes, which provide perspectives on the emerging nature of the workforce. What implications does each one have for learning in your scenario?

We are all moving into the workplace of the future together. It's all about competing for the best people. And the best people are thinking about their work lives in a whole new way. [Employers] have to lose their attachment to the old-fashioned career path.

Bruce Tulgan, Business Leader (QuoteHD, nd)

The most important, and indeed the truly unique contribution of management in the 20th century was the fifty-fold increase in the productivity of the manual worker. The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is similarly to increase the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker.

Peter Drucker, Management Consultant (Drucker, 1999)

... modern humans have radically changed the way that they work and the way that they live. Companies need to change the way they manage and lead to match the way that modern humans actually work and live.

Brian Halligan, CEO and co-founder of HubSpot (Brandon, 2015)

Workplace

I remember being set a piece of work at primary school in the 1960s which asked us to imagine what it would be like living in the year 2000. At the time, the turn of the millennium seemed an age away. My concept of flying to work was informed by a cartoon series of the time called 'The Jetsons' who lived in the imaginary world of 2026, in which the family travelled in their own spaceship. Sadly, I still sit on a packed train with frequent delays.

So, in considering the workplace of the future we must take care not to indulge in misplaced fantasy. Moreover, we need to draw generic principles, as people clearly work in different sectors such as retail, business, finance, manufacturing and healthcare, and in private, public and charitable sectors, which all have unique settings.

However, single fixed-geographic workplace centres are less common, with staff dispersed nationally or globally. With more flexible and home working, anytime, anyplace work patterns are a common option; working hours will be more flexible, with services offered through extended days and people choosing to work hours that suit their life needs. For many, travel will be an integral part of working life, whether that be commuting or moving between locations. To that end, valuable time can be used while en route.

A five-generation workforce will demand facilities that accommodate the needs of diverse age groups who have different requirements. With flexible

working, fixed allocated workspaces will be traded for shared spaces and greater hot-desking. Flexible furniture and room configurations will adapt to changing needs and enable productivity across a diverse staff population. Workspaces will be designed with creative team working in mind; collaborative working across physical and digital spaces will be key. Discretionary effort is increased in good ‘human-designed’ work environments; to get the best from staff, the surroundings really matter.

Communication will be vital, with online and instant connection being commonplace. However, open communication will blur the line between personal and professional life, which will lead to challenges in work–life balance.

Workspaces will be designed with sustainability in mind, forcing reductions in resource use. The workplace will be increasingly digitally enabled, with smart devices and wearable technology becoming more commonplace. The ‘human cloud’ will empower people to work remotely and collaboratively, leveraging the expertise of freelance contract staff. Automation, AI and robotics will enhance the human environment, and in some cases replace human activity in repetitive and transactional tasks. Virtual and augmented reality will provide simulated environments, remote connective working and information overlaid to the work environment. Sensors, data and analytics will allow workplace monitoring to enable facilities staff, managers and workers to optimize work activities and resource usage.

Well-being and work–life balance will be an important consideration, with technology used to support and empower workers in different scenarios. Smart workplace technology will enable staff to monitor their work-life and well-being, supported by real-time integrated health technologies to enable staff to improve their own health.

The emerging workplaces demand new approaches to learning. What does this mean for learning and the workplace?

- With more dispersed workplaces, learning cannot rely on venue-based delivery.
- Diverse locations demand mobile, accessible learning.
- Workplaces will be increasingly digitally enabled with smart devices, augmented and virtual reality which provide accessible and creative learning delivery methods.
- Collaboration will be an integral activity in the workplace and flexible shared workspaces will provide the opportunity for socialized learning.
- Workplace-driven data inform learning needs and opportunities.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

Review the following quotes, which provide perspectives on the emerging nature of the workplace. What implications does each one have for learning in your scenario?

A workplace that is a good place to be attracts people to stay, and that translates directly into improved productivity and material reward... we've challenged stereotypes about white-collar and blue-collar staff; instead of separating them, we bring them together in what I call democratic pavilions.

Lord Norman Foster, Architect (Beard, 2011)

The modern workforce craves humanity as workplace dynamics continue to shift more to collectives, rather than individuals. The responsibility to provide a work environment where every employee feels included falls on the organization.

Eric Mosley, Co-founder and CEO of Globoforce (Mosley, 2017)

Architecture is really about well-being. I think that people want to feel good in a space... On the one hand it's about shelter, but it's also about pleasure.'

Zaha Hadid, Architect (Vogue, 2016)

The secret to happy workplaces isn't spending more money. It's about creating the conditions that allow employees to do their best work... The more a company's message is reinforced in a workplace environment, the easier it is for employees to integrate that vision and relay it to the people they meet.

Ron Friedman, Psychologist (Friedman, nd)

Changes to work, the workforce and the workplace are having profound effects on the nature of learning, providing challenges but fresh opportunities.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

Review the key implications for learning driven by changes to work, the workforce and the workplace in the bullet lists.

- 1 In what specific ways are changes shaping learning in your context?
- 2 Which changes, while not a current priority, will be important in the near future?

Redefining the new learning organization

For many of us, the publication of Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* in 1990 seems like yesterday, and the concepts gained global traction with more than a million copies being sold. In 1997, *Harvard Business Review* identified it as one of the most significant management books of the past 75 years.

Arguably the book was most remembered for Senge's coining of the phrase '*learning organization*' to describe an organization that continuously transforms itself through the learning and development of its members. Senge cited five key attributes of learning organizations:

- **Systems thinking:** A highly functioning organization recognizes that the performance of all its component parts is crucial to its overall success. Improvement, support and measurement for all aspects of an organization's operation are non-negotiable, and ignoring the performance of one function is to the detriment of the whole.
- **Personal mastery:** Success and advantage come from a workforce that learns more quickly than others. A culture must exist in which all individuals are personally motivated to learn, with much coming from daily learning interactions rather than formal channels, which is then shared and embedded in the organization.
- **Mental models:** Many organizations are held back by individual/organizational assumptions or behaviours. Traditions/legacies which had value become redundant. In a progressive culture of learning/improvement, these must be 'unlearned' – organizations must be open to change.
- **Shared vision:** At the heart of organizational motivation/momentum is a shared vision that underpins commitment to learning/improvement. This vision is not imposed but embraces the aspirations of all employees, which fuels direction. A clear vision drives long-term transformation.
- **Team learning:** Growth and problem solving are facilitated when individual learning is shared within teams and in turn across the organization. Silos are dissolved. Collective improvement structures/systems are deliberately put in place to aid learning dissemination.

Why did Senge's vision fail to be realized?

Senge's compelling vision, that successful organizations are built around a learning culture, was elusive. The core weakness of his vision centred on the failure to address the need for distributed leadership, the dispersal of power and an increase in autonomy in the workplace.

Senge set systems thinking as the overarching vision for how a learning organization works. Personal mastery, mental models and shared vision were built on the assumption that people are able to drive change. His fifth discipline, and his key attribute of 'team learning', was meant to permeate the whole organization, breaking down silos and hierarchical authority. But, we all know that bottom-up change only works when people are empowered.

The goal of Senge's learning organization was to change culture, but for that to occur there had to be a change in leadership style, which in most organizations never happened.

Revisiting the concept of the learning organization

Some 25 years on, we at CIPD thought that it would be interesting to revisit the concept of the learning organization to see if the conditions for its fulfilment had changed. Command and control structures appeared less common, and the concepts of distributed leadership and an empowered workforce were more prevalent. Moreover, the widespread presence of technology makes the conditions for connected learning more conducive.

So, in 2017, CIPD commissioned a joint research study in partnership with Towards Maturity to explore whether there was now an emergence of learning organizations and, if so, what principles underpinned their success. Organizations in the top 10 per cent of performers in Towards Maturity's benchmarking index (Towards Maturity, nd) were reviewed to find to what extent they were driving wider organizational engagement and impact and what set them apart in their practice. The study involved data from over 600 global organizations.

The joint report, *'Driving the New Learning Organisation: The potential of L&D'* (CIPD, 2017; Overton and Daly, 2017), revealed six characteristics that were evident at the heart of organizations that had made a significant transition to exhibit key characteristics of being learning organizations.

The six characteristics of new 'learning organizations' are explained in more detail below:

- **Clarity of purpose:** A shared vision and an open dialogue on how people are valued and must need to adapt to deliver the organization's performance.
- **Holistic people experience:** A trusted brand that keeps to its promises and develops innovative, commercial and continuous learning opportunities.
- **Thriving ecosystem:** A people-led system that enables its people, teams and the extended enterprise to thrive and learn linked to common goals.
- **Agile, digitally enabled infrastructure:** A virtual environment that enables a fluid exchange of knowledge, ideas and the adaptation of competence.
- **Intelligent decision making:** A robust platform using insight and performance analytics to drive organisational performance and customer experience.
- **Continual engagement:** A dynamic community that continually builds on business relationships, resulting in energy, resilience and growth.

What was evident was that the modern learning organizations that emerged in the research had achieved the empowered workforce and learning ecosystem that had been so elusive in Senge's model. The 'new' learning organizations

were clearly underpinned by a strong partnership between the business, leaders, managers and L&D team evidenced in each of the six characteristics:

- For ‘Clarity of purpose’, learning is seen as a strategic pillar and enabler in the organization, and leaders and managers are key to drive learning. Learning teams clearly understand the organizational strategy and key KPIs, and develop mutual partnerships within the business. Learning activities are aligned with organizational strategic goals and planned and developed with stakeholders to share in learning design and implementation.
- For ‘Holistic people experience’, organizational leaders and managers are key to motivating and supporting people in their learning. Together with the L&D team, a creative, supportive and integrated learning environment is established. Learning is an integral part of the workflow and part of supervision discussion and performance conversations. Time is provided for reflection on the impact that learning has had on work.
- For ‘Thriving ecosystem’, organizational leaders and managers support learning by incorporating learning into work, encouraging peer support and development at the point of need. Coaching and mentoring are not seen as something for the elite, but for all. L&D teams involve leaders, subject experts and staff as part of the learning ecosystem.
- For ‘Agile, digitally enabled infrastructure’, organizational leaders and managers support the use of technology and access to diverse resources. Technological and virtual environments are key to delivering results, and access to online and mobile devices is enabled. L&D teams leverage appropriate technology solutions and explore all possible learning methods, including the use of communities and social media channels.
- For ‘Intelligent decision making’, organizational leaders and managers provide adequate support to change processes using business data and metrics to define and support impact. Analytics are about gaining foresight as well as hindsight but foresight. The L&D team also uses data and analytics in learning design and delivery.
- For ‘Continual engagement’, organizational leaders and managers support the narrative that encourages learning relationships and a dynamic community in which sharing, telling, working out loud, doing and making mistakes are all seen as part of development and improvement. The L&D team facilitates learning connections across the organization, leveraging multiple learning and communication channels, sharing knowledge and insights and highlighting successes.

The evidence revealed that workplace learning is being redefined. New learning organizations are emerging that have a DNA of clear shared purpose across the workforce, an integrated learning environment promoted by leaders and managers and delivered in-the-flow of work, an ecosystem

and agile digital infrastructure through which learning is delivered at the point of need, and continual engagement and sharing based on the intelligent use of insight and data to target learning to organizational needs.

Victor Hugo said: ‘Nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come.’ That appears to be the case for the learning organization.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

- 1 Senge’s concept of the learning organization underestimated the need for distributed leadership and an empowered workforce to drive change. How do you see those two characteristics demonstrated in your scenario?
- 2 Review the definitions of the six characteristics of the new learning organization:
 - a. clarity of purpose;
 - b. holistic people experience;
 - c. thriving ecosystem;
 - d. agile, digitally enabled infrastructure;
 - e. intelligent decision making;
 - f. continual engagement.

How prevalent is each in your context?

For those that require development, what steps could you take to implement the partnership working between leaders/managers and the L&D team explained above?

‘Work is learning, learning is work’ – learning happens while we work

In many organizations, learning is something you go and do away from the day job. It’s divorced from normal daily activity and too often we hear staff bemoaning that in their view they haven’t undertaken learning because they haven’t been on a course.

In redefining workplace learning, that interpretation needs challenging. A key characteristic from the Towards Maturity CIPD research was the concept of learning being about continual engagement. We are moving from learning being considered as an intervention separate from work to integration in the workflow.

Harold Jache, in his insightful blog post entitled ‘Work is learning, and learning is the work’, highlights that organizations can no longer leave learning to be solely the domain of HR and L&D. Learning is contextual to the work scenario. He suggests: ‘Why would an executive, manager, or supervisor entrust such a core business asset as learning agility to a third-party? Too frequently the learning professional is someone who does not intimately understand the business, the day-to-day work practices, or the fields of expertise’ (Jarche, 2017). Moreover, he also stresses that the pace of the modern organization means there often isn’t time to step back and design learning; to do so will fail to offer a timely solution or, in some cases, the problem or opportunity may have changed.

Jarche highlights that learning drives performance when it is embedded in the workplace context, integrated into work practices and reinforced by colleagues sharing their knowledge. Having said that, we may be better framing the concept as ‘learning happens as we work’, as clearly not all work is learning and vice versa. The two have a high correlation as they are often found together, and that, I believe, is at the heart of what Jarche is noting.

Learning professionals need to re-orientate to consider how learning that is integral to work can be highlighted and supported. That isn’t just about new initiatives but about validating and encouraging development that is naturally occurring, be that through activities such as team meeting interactions, informal coaching, peer sharing, problem solving, technology usage or mistake recognition and recovery, which will be discussed in later chapters of this book.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

- 1 In what areas of your context and role can you recognize that ‘learning happens as we work’?
- 2 How could you share your work practice with peers more?

Embedding learning ‘in-the-flow’ of work

Building on the concept that performance-driving learning is often integral to work, the concept of ‘learning in-the-flow of work’, coined by Josh Bersin, also adds to the redefinition of workplace learning. The notion is simple: learners can access learning at their point of need in the workplace.

Bersin outlines in his article, ‘A new paradigm for corporate training: learning in the flow of work’ (Bersin, 2018), the progression of organizational learning from classrooms to the PC, digital, video, learning management systems (LMS), microlearning and, more recently, learning experience platforms (LXPs). However, he asserts it can’t stop there. He cites the 2018 LinkedIn Learning survey of over 4,000 L&D leaders and business professionals, which highlighted the fact that the biggest barrier to learning is that employees simply don’t have enough time for learning; respondents want to learn at their own pace (58 per cent) and in-the-flow of work (49 per cent) (LinkedIn, 2018). This is further supported by Towards Maturity’s ‘Learner Voice’ research (Towards Maturity, 2016a), which found that 91 per cent of learners want to learn at their own pace.

There is real value in shifting learning into the workplace. Sometimes we face challenges in inspiring learners, but how much more motivational can it be than to address an opportunity or challenge in the moment when it most matters? However, learning in-the-flow of work requires learning practitioners to design and facilitate learning close to the workface, and that requires the tactics explored in this book.

For the purposes of this book, I also make a distinction between ‘learning in-the-flow of work’, which I consider is accessible during work, in the workplace environment and ‘learning in the moment’ which is undertaken without any disruption to the work activity. In the case of the latter, the focus is more often on performance support.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

Where can you currently see learning taking place ‘in-the-flow of work’ and what enables that to happen?

Moving beyond the numbers of 70:20:10

The concept of 70:20:10 is ubiquitous within learning circles and has been a key concept in redefining workplace learning.

It’s a simple notion: 70 per cent of how we learn to do our job effectively comes from workplace experiences, 20 per cent from social interactions such as coaching, feedback, and interactions with others, and 10 per cent from formal instruction, be that in a physical or virtual classroom or through structured courses.

Before considering the future impact and tactics for the use of 70:20:10 in workplace learning, it's worth a short detour to trace the origins of the model, which are a little vague.

There was some reference to the concept, albeit not overtly, in the 1968 study 'Why Adults Learn' (Tough, 1968), but the actual ratio is attributed to work undertaken at the Center for Creative Leadership, a US educational institution, in the 1980s, later formalized in the book *Career Architect Development Planner* (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000): 'The odds are that development will be about 70% from on the job experiences, working on tasks and problems; about 20% from feedback or working around good and bad examples of the need; and 10% from courses and reading' (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000).

More recently, Charles Jennings, for whom I have immense respect and gratitude for his thinking on workplace learning, has popularized the model through his work at the 70:20:10 Institute (70:20:10 Institute, nd). It's important to note that Jennings doesn't advocate 70:20:10 as a fixed approach, something for which he is often unfairly criticized, although using the ratio for an organizational name tends to promote a fixed formula:

It's important to be aware that 70:20:10 is a reference model and not a recipe. The numbers are not a rigid formula. They simply remind us of the facts above – that the majority of learning and development comes through experiential and social learning in the workplace (the '70' and '20') rather than through formal classes and courses (the '10'). (Jennings, 2013)

A fixed view of using the ratio lacks insight and pragmatism and is unhelpful in communicating the nature of an effective learning blend. It can also de-emphasize the value of formal learning (Good Practice, 2018). It is worth noting that the Center for Creative Leadership considers the model to be a 'research-based', 'time-tested' 'rule' (Center for Creative Leadership, nd), even though there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this (Kajewski and Madsen, 2012). Moreover, Will Thalheimer warns against convenient numbers in theories (Thalheimer, 2017).

Perhaps the popularity of the model is because it reinforces the instincts of L&D practitioners (Smith, 2015) in which on-the-job learning, socialized elements and formal courses describe a common learning blend in roughly that magnitude. Sadly, however, an approximated hunch is hardly evidence-based practice.

The application of 70:20:10 is widespread. A survey by the Brandon Hall Group found that more than 60 per cent of those surveyed had adopted the framework to some degree and with some benefit (Wentworth, 2015). The approach is also used flexibly in many organizations in which aspects of the learning provision are aligned to the principle (Good Practice, 2018). Around half of L&D leaders believe that their approach is strongly shaped by models, such as 70:20:20, that support learning in-the-flow of work (Towards Maturity, 2016b).

If 70:20:10 is to be of use in redefining workplace learning, it has to be about an approach to highlight the blend rather than a fixed application of the numbers. Having reviewed a number of sources, the following benefits have been distilled (Good Practice, 2016, 2018; Kajewski and Madsen, 2012; Towards Maturity, 2016b).

70:20:10 used in a flexible manner:

- reinforces a broad learning culture;
- acts as a catalyst for evolving L&D ethos and practice;
- provides a means to assess the spread of learning activities and gaps;
- challenges an ‘old school’ academic mindset;
- brings a broader focus to the design of solutions;
- highlights development options for staff;
- empowers managers in the learning process;
- creates a shared vision for leaders, managers and staff.

Moreover, there are measurable outcomes, with staff more likely to have access to job aids, curated content, coaching and mentoring, in-house experts and social collaboration (Towards Maturity, 2016b). Perhaps the most valuable use of 70:20:10 is to be a catalyst to create a shared of vision for a dynamic blend that supports *‘work is learning, learning is work’* and *‘learning in-the-flow of work’*. To that point, the Good Practice report ‘The evolution of 70:20:10 – will L&D survive or thrive?’ highlights: ‘Through experimentation, ways of working with 70:20:10 have become more sophisticated and innovative, and the profession is moving forward as a result... 70:20:10 has acted as a change agent, influencing not only ways of thinking, but our ways of doing too’ (Good Practice, 2018).

So, we need to move beyond inflexible interpretations of the numbers and recognize the value of the model in redefining learning in the workplace, which too often has leant on formal face-to-face solutions.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

- 1 How do you view 70:20:10: is it a fixed format or flexible framework?
- 2 What are the dangers of adopting 70:20:10 as a framework?
- 3 In reviewing the list of benefits in the flexible use of the 70:20:10, which would be most useful in your scenario?

It's time to establish a new learning philosophy

So, here's a challenge. If we asked everyone in an organization what they think of when they hear the word 'cake', you would have many different views. Some would think of a slice of rich chocolate cake, others lemon drizzle, some a deep Victoria sponge, a pink and yellow checkerboard Battenberg and others would imagine a rich fruit cake. The images that would be invoked are endless and it's unlikely that there would be much agreement. This is an important analogy in redefining workplace learning.

If you asked everyone in an organization to think about what constitutes 'learning' you would get an equally varied view. Some would consider a classroom-based session, some would think about using technology, others may consider an experiential learning event and others would think about being coached. And, if you asked where learning takes place, the list could be endless.

In our fast-changing organizational settings, learning is vital, but with so many ways to learn, it's crucial that everyone shares a common vision of how learning now takes place.

In the CIPD research report 'Professionalising Learning and Development' (CIPD, 2019), which I had the privilege of co-authoring, one of the key emerging factors that prevented learning innovation was the limited vision that many leaders had for learning; for many it equated to traditional face-to-face methods. This attitude forces learning professionals into a vicious cycle; in this old-style environment they find it challenging to innovate, which has a detrimental effect on learning impact, which in turn diminished leaders' views of the learning function. L&D therefore gets stuck in the mire.

What organizations need is a fresh vision for modern workplace learning which is communicated and owned by all; and that's where creating a 'learning philosophy' plays a vital part.

What is a 'learning philosophy'?

Learning philosophies aren't new; in fact they are most prevalent in education where many teachers develop a personal philosophy that underpins their practice. I really like that – having a clear personal DNA statement of how learning is developed and delivered.

In an organizational context, a learning philosophy is an inspirational statement that defines key characteristics about the vision for learning in an organization. It states *why* learning is vital. It highlights *what* learning is essential and desirable. It explains *who* is responsible in the learning process. And it defines *when* and *where* learning can be undertaken and *how* it is designed and facilitated (Stitzlein, 2010).

By defining answers to these foundational questions, everyone can then share a common understanding and expectation of how learning will transform the organization.

How to develop a learning philosophy to redefine organizational learning

I led a project at CIPD, inspired by a challenge from the senior leadership team, to provide clarity about a new vision for workplace learning.

The aim was to establish principles for organizations about the nature of future-focused learning which would also be the foundation for CIPD's own L&D provision. The project involved the development of a 'learning philosophy' that defined leading-edge and evidence-based thinking to shape the design, facilitation and delivery of workplace learning.

Leading a small team, equally passionate about supporting modern learning, the approach looked backwards and forwards. The backward view involved going back to first principles by reviewing over 30 adult learning theories. By looking at viewpoints from behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism, design-based and connectivism we assessed which we believed still had validity in future-focused workplace learning. The forward view involved extensive consultation through CIPD's professional network and a review of case studies from CIPD's events and awards to define effective organizational learning. The findings were presented via series of questions which formed a new 'learning philosophy' statement (CIPD, 2018).

The philosophy provided CIPD with a clear definition of the components to underpin its own approach to learning, as an international professional HR and L&D membership body. This would be something that would be shared not only within the organization but with wider stakeholders.

However, the process clearly had wider value in helping other organizations redefine their own fresh vision for learning. The following questions provide the framework for developing a new learning philosophy.

WHY...

First, it's important to define why learning is essential for the organization. We must highlight learning's key role in driving the strategy, goals, performance, innovation and competitive advantage. Also, why does the organization believe it must invest in staff development and why it's a vital part of staff engagement?

WHAT...

Next, we should define *what* key things the organizational learning aims to achieve? For example, ensuring key competencies, skills, behaviours or audit requirements. In *what* ways does learning focus on the existing and future needs of the organization and *what* things inform the learning priorities?

WHO...

Third, who is learning for? Is the organization's vision for everyone to engage in development? Do some roles have particular needs and priorities?

And who has responsibilities in the learning process; for example, the learner, managers, senior leaders and the L&D team?

WHEN...

Next, when should staff expect to engage in learning? Is it part of a life-long learning process promoted by the organization? Are there particular times when development is important, for example at induction, on promotion to a new role or during organizational change? Do staff undertake learning only during work hours or can they access learning in their own time, if desired?

WHERE...

Fifth, where does the organization recognize and promote that learning takes place? For example, in face-to-face settings, in-the-flow of work or using technology. Does it value the importance of both formal and informal learning such as workshops and naturally occurring coaching discussions?

HOW...

While the why, what, who, when and where are contextual for organizations, we distilled 12 key things that underpin how effective learning is designed and facilitated, founded on evidence-based insights, which we believe are now non-negotiables for aspiring future-focused learning organizations:

- Learning needs are informed by relevant insights, data and metrics.
- Learning design must consider unique learner needs; that increases motivation and impact in the learner's context.
- Learning effectiveness reviews must be embedded throughout the learning design, delivery and review cycle. Learning impact is demonstrated through quantitative and qualitative feedback.
- Learning must be capable of being designed and deployed rapidly to meet learner needs and is improved through an iterative feedback process.
- Learning must be accessible anytime, anyplace, with the planned use of synchronous (at the same time) and asynchronous (not occurring at the same time) activities, technology, resources and support.
- Learning design and delivery must provide room for pre-thinking, participation, experimentation and reflection.
- Learning designers and facilitators must create engaging multimedia environments that increase learning interest and effectiveness.
- Learning designers and facilitators must apply findings from behavioural science for effective learning transfer.
- Learning designers and facilitators must foster an environment of 'flow' where learners become interested, immersed and free from anxiety or boredom.

- Learning designers and facilitators must encourage self-direction in learning. Learners should be encouraged to explore things that will make a difference in their context as part of a lifelong learning process.
- Learning communities and conversations must be encouraged and facilitated through face-to-face and online networking.
- Learning must support the development of personal resilience and promote well-being, as learning application often involves challenges.

If we are to redefine workplace learning, we must create a clear, concise statement of principles around which everyone in the organization can gather, and which inform the design and delivery of learning activities.



REFLECTION ON YOUR CONTEXT... SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

- 1 Thinking about the *why, what, who, when, where* and *how* of learning, what are the common views in your scenario and which perceptions need challenging?
- 2 What value would there be in creating a 'learning philosophy' in your scenario?
- 3 Creating a new 'learning philosophy' requires time and wider stakeholder engagement. What steps would you need to take to define the *why, what, who, when, where* and *how* as part of redefining a fresh vision for organizational learning and whom would you need to engage?

The need to unlearn

In redefining workplace learning, the issue isn't simply about embracing the new thinking; it requires the 'unlearning' of the old ways. And that isn't easy. People have outdated mental models, and despite a new statement of intention through a learning philosophy, people naturally swerve back to previous thinking. It can be hard to rewire and unlearn.

This challenge is well illustrated by Destin Sandlin's famous experiment, the 'backwards brain bicycle', which involves a bicycle on which the steering is reversed. It sounds a simple conversion to cope with – you just need to turn the handle bars the opposite way, but it completely throws the cyclist's coordination, with few being able to progress more than a metre without falling off. There is an excellent YouTube clip which you can watch to see the experiment (Sandlin, 2015).

It's a classic example of the tension between the 'thinking brain', the cerebrum, and the 'non-thinking' brain, the cerebellum, although the concept of the cerebellum being non-thinking has been challenged (Bergland, 2016). Routine thinking developed over many years leads to rut-like responses. When we change things, hardwired neural pathways don't easily disengage; that only happens over time as the new concepts are reinforced and through the process of neuroplasticity our thought processes are rewired.

That's the case when it comes to organizational learning. We have engrained thinking and preferences. How often do staff think that they haven't undertaken any learning because they haven't been on a face-to-face course? And how many senior leaders like to receive statistics about how many 'training days' have been delivered in the organization as a valid measure of the learning that has taken place?

We have become fixated on programmes as the primary means to provide learning opportunities. It's the dominant go-to method in the minds of senior leaders, managers, staff and, sadly, many L&D teams. However, the vista for learning is now broad, with many creative ways for development in the workflow beyond traditional courses.

Albert Einstein is attributed to have said: 'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them' (Wisdom to Inspire, nd). It will take time and effort to embed a fresh vision for organization learning which is delivered in-the-flow of work, using a blend of experiential, social and formal learning, of which the latter is the smallest component. But that is the challenge ahead.

It not only time to define workplace learning, it's a necessity if we are to drive performance and support the transformation of our organizations.



CASE STUDY

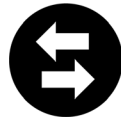
Tate – creating a learning philosophy

Founded in 1897, Tate is a network of four UK museums, Tate Britain and Tate Modern in London, Tate Liverpool and Tate St Ives, which together house the Tate Collection of British and international modern and contemporary art.

Tate developed a learning philosophy to redefine their interaction with the public (Tate, 2013; Tate, nd). The philosophy, incorporating creative learning experiences, is publicized on Tate's website with an inspiring video from the director of learning. Moreover, a downloadable resource defines the part that stakeholders, such as families, schools, teachers, young people, visitors and staff such as the learning team, play in the learning vision. It's worth reviewing to inspire your own learning philosophy (Tate, 2013, nd).

The philosophy establishes the approaches through which Tate develops and deploys inclusive art-based learning to promote engagement in contemporary cultural and artistic life. Art is seen as a means to support inclusive personal learning journeys that transform the way people think through joyful, social, emotional and intellectual experiences. Tate believes everyone has the capacity to develop and engage in some way, from personal development, to social connectivity, to enhanced abstract and aesthetic thinking, and designs activities accordingly.

The development of the learning philosophy not only guides Tate's creative activities and engagement with visitors but has transformed the work of the organization.



Summary and performance pointers

To drive performance through learning, we must consider the fast-changing organizational contexts and redefine our approach to learning. Here are some performance pointers:

- The rapid transformation of work, the workforce and the workplace demands a redefinition in the design and delivery of organizational learning. Map how these factors influence learning in your context.
- While 'learning organizations', which continuously transform themselves through L&D, have been difficult to achieve, recent research reveals six keys that underpin new learning organizations. Consider how the key factors are being modelled in your context: clarity of purpose, a holistic people experience, a thriving ecosystem, agile, digitally enabled infrastructure, continual engagement and intelligent decision making.
- We must challenge established thinking that learning is about attending events to embrace 'work is learning, learning is work' and 'learning in-the-flow of work'. How can you design an appropriate blend of experiential, social and formal learning options (70:20:10), of which formal is the minor method?
- While the 70:20:10 learning model has become ubiquitous, get beyond thinking of fixed percentages to the model being a flexible framework to promote, design and deliver an appropriate blend.
- As the views of L&D will vary across organizations, consider developing an organizational 'learning philosophy' that establishes a common vision and expectation for how learning is now designed, delivered and evaluated.

| | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What does this mean for me? My action plan... | |
| Things I need to do... | Things I need to find out more about... |
| | |
| Things I need to stop doing... | People I need to talk to and engage with... |
| | |

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