



Learning & Development 2020

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Possible future scenarios

Introduction

TJ has been running a project with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) looking at the future of Learning & Development, with a time horizon of 2020. The project is being run in two main phases; first a look at the outside world to see what trends and discontinuities might impact the world of L&D over the coming years. The second phase will look at the implications for L&D practitioners of these possible changes by considering possible future scenarios.

The work so far has consisted of IES drawing from a range of sources to identify thirty seven broad trends or developments that might change the future work and learning landscape. These were grouped in the areas of society, work & business, brain & mind and technology; some are natural extensions of some of the trends already affecting L&D, whilst others aim to look a little further out.

Since anyone who tries to predict the future is almost always wrong, these trends and themes were designed to be provocative and stimulating rather than predictions of what will actually happen. It is easy to forget that if we look back just twelve years, most of us didn't have ready access to the internet or the powerful mobile devices that we now rely on. At the same time, the rapid development of home working and portfolio careers has yet to emerge at the rate predicted at that time.

We then ran a workshop with the sponsoring organisations to present the trends, but also get new ideas from the highly knowledgeable participants who not only added new ideas but also helped to shape the existing ones. The key themes were then mapped on an importance/uncertainty grid (see Appendix 1 on page 8).

Phase 2 – A Scenario Approach

As can be seen from the original 37 themes and the importance/uncertainty grid, there are very many factors to consider when thinking about the future of L&D. Probably too many for most of us to consider at one time!

A recognised approach for dealing with a wide range of factors where there is high uncertainty about some of them is that of using scenarios to describe the future. Scenarios are really just rich descriptions of how different futures might look – they are not predictions but are alternative possible ways that the future might evolve that can be used to facilitate a discussion about how organisations or individuals might respond in a particular scenario.

One of the goals in having scenarios is that they provide

a manageable number of different situations for people to think about – usually between three and five scenarios are developed. Scenarios are usually designed around those factors that have the greatest uncertainty and the highest impact, with the other factors incorporated in the scenarios where they most naturally fit the emerging story.

Looking at the importance/uncertainty grid for the current project, we see that evaluation (or perhaps demonstrating impact), learning for work or life, government or corporate influence, well-being agenda and brokers & guilds are the factors in the top right hand corner of high uncertainty and high importance. These then are good candidates for designing the scenarios around.

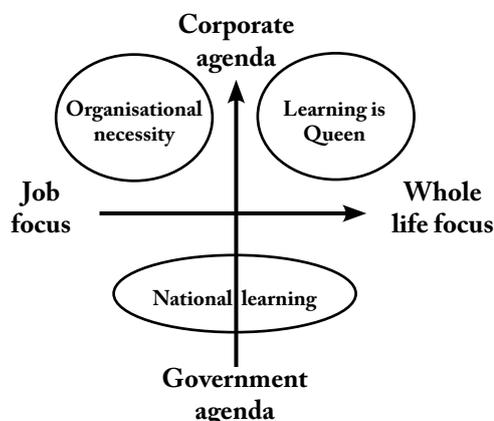
After some discussion, we have decided to create three possible scenarios as alternative, distinct views of the future. They are designed to describe relatively extreme situations that might emerge rather than the middle ground.

The three scenarios at a very high level are as follows:

- L&D is queen – impact of learning is clear and learning & well-being are highly important for organisations, learning is for whole life not just work
- Organisational necessity – economy and competition is tough, learning is focused on just immediate work issues and is seen as a cost to be contained
- National learning – UK Plc is struggling and the government is driving the learning and well-being agenda, companies are reluctant to invest in training

For simplicity, these can be thought of as lying on a simple two axis area where the axes are:

- Corporate vs government driven agenda
- Job vs whole life focus



Scenario I - L&D is Queen

In this first scenario, L&D is genuinely embraced as a driving factor in business success and individual fulfilment. L&D activities are not seen as purely remedial for fixing people's weaknesses but are regarded as an integral part of people's on-going growth and contribution. The impact of L&D on organisational performance has been clearly demonstrated so that the focus is no longer on whether development activities deliver a return on investment, but more on how to maximise the benefits of that investment.

As the age and values base of the workforce has shifted, organisations are much more effective at understanding the needs of different groups of people such as different generations. They apply sophisticated segmentation and analysis techniques, as well as tailored one to one discussions, to help identify the best development programmes for people. Individuals see that an on-going programme to help them fully achieve their potential is an essential ingredient when deciding where to work. Self-employed people and small business owners also recognise the critical role of L&D and invest significantly in their own personal growth plans.

L&D is not focused just on those activities that will help someone do their job better but is more broadly aimed at how to help people lead fulfilling and happy lives as well as contributing even more to the organisation and society. Organisations, recognising the importance of having the best people and developing them further, take an active interest in people's lives and for their key talent pools may take a maternalistic approach to managing their lives, perhaps providing high quality corporate housing and other services to encourage people to stay with the organisation.

Changes in technology and the globalisation of many businesses and markets mean that the traditional work-life boundaries have blurred even further with people balancing the business requirements with their lifestyle patterns. Working away from the office, be that at home or on the move, becomes the predominant work pattern for many. This leads to different styles of management being developed for getting the best from these workforces. Individuals also need to develop their own skills in managing their work-life boundaries and balance.

Whilst training time away from the job is still used (but significantly reduced) for introducing new skills and knowledge, it is recognised that the best learning is achieved through planned experiences and unplanned opportunities in which people unconsciously and implicitly develop greater capabilities. This learning is made more conscious through activities such as coaching, mentoring and action learning. Individuals are now more skilled at learning from other people

who they see as role models for the particular thing they are looking to develop. They also tap into the highly developed social networking communities both within their own organisations and in their broader subject areas to learn the latest or best ideas in a certain area. Given the rate of change being experienced, this is often on an as required basis rather than through planned learning activities. Sharing their own skills and knowledge with others becomes a key element of people's own activities. Larger organisations look to find ways to get this learning accredited leading to formal qualifications for people who engage in continuous learning.

As L&D becomes less based on set piece interventions and becomes more on-going, social and informal, the boundaries between the L&D and Organisational Development (OD) disciplines blur even further. At the core of business success and organisational change is the need for the people to learn and develop, and this learning is embedded in the change processes not seen as programmes or courses that people go on. With the evidence that L&D (and OD) make a demonstrable strategic impact on business performance, the L&D/OD function has a seat at the top table on a par with the CFO.

Given the recognised breadth and depth of the impact of L&D, the focus of measurement and evaluation is now on a wider range of measures than simple return on investment. In many cases a balanced scorecard approach is taken to the measurement of L&D, looking not just at the organisational dimensions but also the individual ones too.

Scenario 2 - Organisational necessity

Whilst markets are competitive in all the scenarios, they are particularly tough in Scenario Two. Competition is very hard and organisations are focused on keeping costs down. Although learning is recognised as important, it is also seen as a cost in both time and money.

In this environment, L&D activities are focused on the skills and knowledge that are required to do the immediate job. Gaps are identified and low-cost programmes put in place to plug them. The immediate feedback from investing in any development has to be clear to whoever is paying the bill through providing a demonstrable change in individual or business performance. L&D interventions become very transactional; what will I get for my money? There is little or no sense of investing for the future and certainly not in anything that isn't directly relevant to business performance.

The focus is on the two key elements of cost – time and money. How can we do the development in the least possible time and for the smallest amount of money? This has focused people on new modes of delivery that take less time. Just-in-time learning becomes a part of life as intelligent systems recognise when people have the opportunity to learn and provide feedback on what they have just done and appropriate suggestions for how to improve. As development needs are recognised, employees are provided with short, technology based learning modules – these will typically be 30-90 minutes long and delivered on-line, via mobile phones or hand held devices or as podcasts.

Where some form of personal interaction is called for in the development process, this is again facilitated by technology using telepresence or virtual presence approaches. Telepresence takes video-conferencing to a new level with 3-D holograms and high quality images making it seem that the other person is really there. This can be used for developing soft skills and for providing one to one coaching much more cost effectively. Learning will also happen through virtual worlds with individuals visiting the virtual world to meet people from other locations, listen to training presentations and interact with the other participants. Simulations and business games are delivered using technology allowing people to experiment in safe conditions. With the focus on cost-effectiveness, organisations access much of the technology on a pay-as-you-go basis, only paying for what they use. Small businesses and sole practitioners are also able to learn using the same service providers.

Some organisations have decided that it is too difficult and expensive for their staff to learn everything required to do their jobs in an increasingly litigious society. They have gone down the route of using neural implants to ensure that staff have the right knowledge to give

customers the correct answers. Although somewhat controversial, smart drugs are handed out to staff at the start of the day to get them into a productive state of mind and to help them manage (control) their emotional responses to difficult situations.

In this highly competitive world, organisations have reduced staff costs to a bare minimum and consequently there is fierce competition for the available jobs. Businesses use this situation to their advantage by expecting people to do significant chunks of their learning and development in their own time, and at their own cost. Those who aren't employed have to invest for themselves to ensure that they are best positioned to take advantage of any opportunities that do arise.

Scenario 3 - National learning and well-being

Recognising the growth of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and the potential impact that they will have on the UK's ability to compete, successive governments have put skills development at the heart of their strategies. The UK is just about hanging on to its position in the first division of labour capability but is having to fight ever harder to attract inward investment. At the same time there has been increasing convergence amongst the leading political parties that economic success is not sufficient for a thriving country – a focus on well-being and personal fulfilment is also important. However, it is the relatively newly formed Liberal Social Party (LSP) that has really driven this broader agenda and its innovative policies have led to its recent election successes and the forming of a new government with Gross National Well-being sitting alongside GDP as a key measure.

As a result of the increasing competition from overseas, many more organisations are operating on a contractor model, only hiring in people when they need them; be this for a few months or a few hours. They are looking for people who have the requisite skills and fit with their brand. As a result of this model, there is a significant increase in self-employment and temporary work leading to difficulty interpreting traditional employment figures. Some organisations retain the traditional model and employ large numbers of people but more and more are based on a small central organisation with outsourcing to suppliers of some elements and use of contractors for others, allowing them to be highly fleet of foot in responding to the global business challenges.

Of course, the rise of new technologies and globalisation of many businesses mean that opportunities to work will not just be available with UK based employers but also for overseas organisations. However, this also means that competition for contract work will come from the global arena too. Whilst some people love the new found freedom offered by the new employment model, others find it hard to cope, preferring some kind of attachment to an organisation. Employment brokers and occupational guilds respond to the needs of these people by providing a wide range of services to not only help people find work but also maintain social contact and manage their lives more broadly. These are where many people now place their first allegiance.

Managers and leaders in the employing organisation have developed new sets of skills and capabilities to help them shape a cohesive workforce out of this contract based labour pool, requiring highly honed people management and motivational skills, including the ability to manage people from different cultures. Leaders in brokers and guilds also have these skills as they find that they need to manage and motivate their individual clients or members.

With this disparate labour market, employers are less prepared to invest in individual's development and so the Government pushes the learning agenda and invests in educational establishments and also incentives for employers. It is now clearly recognised that employability is not just about skills but also individual's mindsets and significant effort is put into shifting these habitual ways of thinking. At the same time Government is also highly focused on the well-being agenda and implements a range of measures nationally to track well-being, and encourages employers and brokers/guilds to do likewise. In addition to the well-being focus, there is continued attention to the environmental agenda and Government is also working to ensure that organisations contribute effectively to an improving climatic and environmental situation.

Society has become increasingly polarised in this individually competitive world where those who get work find even more and those that don't get increasingly marginalised. This latter group of people are also those for whom access to the latest technology is difficult and hence they struggle to develop the skills required by employers. Back to work or employability initiatives take on a new shape as the predominant model is one of temporary employment for a variety of different employers.

Appendix I: Importance/uncertainty grid

