



White Paper

New ways of learning inside and beyond the organization

New ways of working

Huge changes are afoot in the workplace. Hierarchies are flattening, organizational boundaries are softening and extending, and even the traditional concepts of a 'job' and a job role are being questioned as work becomes more focused on bringing the right expertise together at the right time to solve specific problems and challenges.

Josh Bersin, CEO of Bersin and Associates, terms this world 'the borderless workplace'—an ecosystem where workers communicate continually and seamlessly across time and distance with co-workers both inside and outside their own organization.

An extended enterprise is a typical representation of a borderless workplace where, in order to realize value, the entire value chain operates seamlessly as if it were a single unit.

The evolution from discrete to extended enterprises is a response to a working world of continuous flux, where change is the normal state and speed of execution is the key driver. Every year organizations respond to the pressures to deliver new services and products faster and with greater levels of innovation. Everyone is under pressure to do more with less, and do it better year-on-year. This simply can't be achieved without high levels of coordination within organizations and across their business partnerships—their suppliers, their resellers and ultimately, their customers.

The key enablers in this rapidly changing world are the capabilities of workers, and the flexibility and capabilities of the technologies that support them.

It is often said that 'it's not about the technology.' However, the technology is vital and there is no denying that in a world that is becoming increasingly dependent on technology to 'get stuff done' the technology is the lynchpin for success.

Learning and capability-building is no exception. Without the right technology it is almost impossible to achieve target business goals.

Building expertise in a world in flux

Underpinned by ubiquitous communications and work centered around tasks and projects, expertise is built through exposure to challenging experiences, through practice, through rich conversations and through reflection across ever-increasing networks of co-workers and collaborating organizations.



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It is this world into which we need to design and deploy our learning solutions and infrastructures. It is complex. It involves the provision of a wide range of learning experiences—from formal classroom-based events to continuous on-the-job workplace performance support. Learning solutions are no longer simple one channel activities. They may involve a myriad of interventions and multiple technology requirements from simple web-based interactive learning content, through rich collaborative and immersive simulations and community-based learning, to informal on-demand support in the workplace.

This is the real 21st century world of the extended enterprise.

Supporting new entrants to the workforce

An entire new generation of workers is being injected into this new world of work. Often termed the millennials, many in this group have vastly different expectations and aspirations from those of their leaders and managers. The gulfs are often too patently obvious.

These new entrants are inculcated into an ‘always on’ world of instant access and constant connection, where agility and fluidity are part of their *raison d’être*. They will undoubtedly make up the engine room of the emerging extended enterprise. And their number is growing and will continue. The generations following them will be even further removed from our current operating models based on ‘scientific management’ and our concepts of discrete organizations that operate with only limited interaction with value chains and even less with competitors.

Into the future

It is important to remember that by 2020, more than half the workforce will be members of the millennial and post-millennial generation, knowing nothing but a hyper-connected world. Although there will obviously be variation in their expectations and responses, their life experiences will inevitably influence these.

These life experiences will be vastly different from those of the pre-millennial generations. Our learning infrastructures will need to fit with these new expectations and life experiences or they will simply be discarded.

New ways of learning

Although the changes taking place in the world of work will not ring the immediate death knell at a stroke for all our traditional approaches to building employee capability through away-from-work structured courses, programs and workshops—success will undoubtedly emerge from supporting new ways of learning rather than attempting to maintain the status quo.

To this end, e-Learning and other digital learning approaches have made inroads into organizational learning in previous years.

Learning and work are converging

Despite all the developments, there are still some major hurdles.

Today’s world of e-Learning is still primarily centered on the idea that learning and work are separate activities.

This world of courses and learning separate from work is starting to diminish as business leaders, HR Directors and CLOs strive to meet the increasing demands of the distributed workforce. However there is still some way to go before learning can be fully driven by the worker in the context of the particular business task or problem to be solved.

In a world of constant flux, knowledge may still be powerful but access to the right information and the right knowledge at the right time, in context, to achieve business outcomes is where the real power lies.

This is where performance-centric, business-focused learning infrastructure is vital. Without the ability to support the specific performance requirements of all individuals, no matter what their role and no matter where they work in the extended enterprise ecosystem, learning infrastructure will remain a tool supporting HR processes and operational efficiency rather than supporting business outcomes, increased revenues, higher customer satisfaction and other important business metrics.

Business-focused learning

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This leads to a move away from ‘knowledge transfer’ as the principal objective of learning. It is far more complex than that.

Workers need support to help achieve their targets and to build their skills and capability. Business drivers move focus firmly to doing rather than just knowing—to action rather than knowledge. Yet much of the focus of e-Learning and organizational learning remains on building knowledge and ensuring process is followed and completed.

Learning is of little or no value if it doesn’t change behavior for the better and drive business performance. Organizational learning in the modern world needs its prime focus to be on supporting activity and actions that help achieve desired business outcomes.

The focus on supporting business-led performance presents a major challenge for learning infrastructure that has been designed and installed to meet the needs of the HR department. HR needs tend to be fixed around process management, whether management of talent, management of core competencies, or management of employee compliance and career development. HR-led learning rarely focuses around supporting immediate business objectives.

New learning infrastructures need to respond to these new ways of learning as much as they need to respond to the new ways of working across the extended enterprise.

Learning in a torrent of data

By 2020, information will be increasingly unstructured and with an even shorter half-life. The ‘correct’ information or knowledge acquired last week is increasingly likely to have been superseded with new or different information or knowledge this week.

It is a world where access to resources and content to support continuous learning is essential, and where consistency of content available to all parts of the enterprise and the extended business ecosystem of suppliers, resellers and customers is critical. This is the world for which we need to build our learning systems.

Finding needles in haystacks

Efficiently creating, finding, organizing and analyzing information will become even more vital as searching for information to support meaningful information consumes workers' time.

Information work is expensive and valuable only if workers have access to the right information and have developed the right skills to make meaningful decisions.

Our learning tools and infrastructures need to help workers address all of these challenges.

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The rise and rise of informal learning

Informal learning is a far more prevalent form of knowledge and skill acquisition than its formal counterpart.

A fact that is hardly necessary to point out, but often needs reinforcing, is that formal and informal learning are not competing entities. They are complementary. Two parts of a whole.

It is not an either/or situation with formal and informal learning. Both contribute to individual and organizational success. It is simply that a great deal more informal than formal learning occurs.

Learning infrastructures in the 21st century world of interlinked and extended enterprises need to be designed to support structured, directed learning and informal self-directed learning. With learning increasingly moving into the digital world, the responsibility of serving these two masters falls on the tools and systems we develop as part of our learning ecosystems.

Proprietary and tacit knowledge

Proprietary and tacit knowledge are very valuable commodities for any organization. Learning infrastructure needs to support not only the codification and distribution of both, but also the two-way sharing of information that leads to the development of these assets.

Capturing proprietary knowledge

Proprietary knowledge has always been the jewel in the crown for any organization. It is the differentiator that places clear water between one organization and the next and creates the value that maintains an organization's unique offering.

In the world of the extended enterprise, the ability to capture and share proprietary knowledge is even more critical—and sometimes more complex—than sharing more general information. Especially as the pressures to deliver at speed increase and many organizations are losing the luxury of the two-step process employed by many training or L&D departments—of capturing information from a subject matter expert and converting it into a format that is appropriate for distribution. Although that approach worked in the slowly evolving world 50 years ago, it is simply inadequate to meet the multidirectional and rapid information-rich working world today. Tools and infrastructure are needed to share experience and expertise, information and knowledge directly—in many directions at once.

Distributed content creation

This leads to the obvious conclusion that any appropriate learning infrastructure must support the facility for distributed content creation with simple tools and processes for content modification and updating.

It is important that knowledge flows in extended enterprises are two-way. A dealer, a reseller or a customer is often as likely to provide the insight that feeds innovation and proprietary knowledge creation as the product development team. This is where the support of social learning, collaboration, and communities adds significant value.

Any infrastructure for the extended enterprise should contain tools and facilities for two-way flow of learning materials and sharing of expertise. One-way flow will provide limited value, but opportunities of engaging and sharing across the wider ecosystem will be lost.

In other words, one-way learning infrastructures that ignore the opportunity to capture and share ‘the wisdom of the crowds’ in all its forms—especially when those ‘crowds’ are part of the value chain—does so at its own peril.

Capturing tacit knowledge

To fully exploit the learning and performance potential of an extended enterprise environment, it is vital to facilitate the free flow of data, information and learning resources, together with captured experiences with easy access to expertise to help solve problems as easily and quickly as possible.

There is much real value to an extended enterprise that comes from the ability to capture tacit knowledge and to share it quickly and seamlessly.

The traditional training design and development model takes tacit knowledge and makes it explicit through training content, but we need learning infrastructure to support a wider set of processes than simply the development of training materials.

21st century learning infrastructures need to support other aspects of learning and sense-making. They should support either in native form, or integrate with systems and tools that do support their fully networked workers/learners in such a way as to answer questions such as the following:

- How do I keep track of all of this information?
- How can I find the learning resources or experts to help me complete my current task now?
- How do I make sense of changing conditions and new knowledge in my working ecosystem?
- How can I develop and improve my critical thinking skills?
- How can I cooperate with my colleagues and others better and more effectively?
- How can I engage in problem-solving activities at the edge of my expertise?

If learning infrastructure design focuses on addressing these questions, and others like them, it will certainly help people ‘work smarter.’

A number of learning infrastructure platforms have well-integrated content production and LCMS functions. This is an essential feature for extended enterprise support.

Democratizing content

There has been a rapid change from a world where learning content was a scarce resource to one where it is abundant.

In addition, there has been a shift from a world where learning content production was an arcane and highly specialized art to one made much easier through the availability of comprehensive tools coupled with simple delivery mechanisms. Many ‘rapid content’ platforms are available which, although still requiring a sound understanding of learning content design, have removed many barriers.

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Freeing content development

Many leading universities now make their teaching, learning and resource content freely available openly and globally. The open education resource movement, started by MIT’s Open Courseware Project, began the movement which has impacted the way we now view educational content.

Business—and work-based learning is likely to follow this trend, with the development of crowdsourced community driven learning content services and portals, and content being developed by distributed teams of designers and subject matter experts—from within the extended enterprise ecosystem or outside it—who come together on a project-by-project basis, using a common authoring platform within a democratized content authoring framework.

User-generated content production

This content democratization presents a significant change as the walls between producers and consumers of content are broken down.

Forward-looking learning platforms enable distributed content production and easy content sharing using integrated rapid content development tools to exploit distributed content development.

Clearly, the future of learning content is one of distributed development and distributed consumption within a cycle of rapid re-use and contextualization being developed by distributed teams of designers and subject matter experts—from within the extended enterprise ecosystem or outside it—who come together on a project-by-project basis. These teams use a common authoring platform within a democratized content authoring framework.

As rates of change increase and the half-life of enterprise knowledge shortens, the development and renewal of learning content will become more and more time-critical.

Organizations without learning architectures that provide integrated tools to support rapid content production and distribution simply won’t be able to keep up.

Going mobile

Mobile access is a critical channel for learning in the extended enterprise. Its importance is likely to move in only one direction.

The support for mobile learning will become a core requirement for extended enterprise learning infrastructure.

Mobile support needs to extend from learning content delivery to providing a conduit for collaborative working and learning, and to providing performance support in context in the workplace.

Supporting social learning

The power of technology-supported social learning is starting to be realized and many learning platform providers have built 'social' modules into their platforms.

This is certainly a step in the right direction. However, fragmented social 'add-ons' to LMS-managed courses is only a first step, and not a fully-formed solution. Provision for social learning needs to break free of the course paradigm and support, as well as the entire range of non-course learning.

Social learning has tremendous potential for the extended enterprise. The challenge for infrastructure providers is to be able to support or integrate a range of social learning activities across disparate networks and corporate IT structures.

One answer to this dilemma is for the extended enterprise platform to become malleable—to allow different branding and functionality for each enterprise partner, and also to provide the 'social glue' necessary for rich social learning across the entire extended enterprise—whether the social environments are part of the platform or loosely-coupled generic ones.

New role for LMS

Claire Schooley of Forrester identifies a new role for the LMS within an emerging mobile and social learning world. She points out that learning infrastructure needs to:

- Integrate informal learning tools (including social).
- Provide Amazon-type content evaluation and rating of expert help.
- Allow flexibility of taking courses offline and from mobile devices.
- Provide robust tagged content search so learners can find a piece of content or document they need to do their job.

Only those flexible enough to provide these facilities across the discrete enterprise as well as across the extended enterprise will be fit-for-purpose.'

Getting learning infrastructure right for the extended enterprise

In addition, next generation learning infrastructures need to be:

- **Robust**—allowing for information to flow quickly and easily around the enterprise and across the extended enterprise.
- **Seamless**—providing portal-like access via a range of devices—PCs, tablets, smartphones and other personal productivity tools.

- **Integrated**—with equally straightforward access for employees, partners, suppliers, resellers and others outside the organizational firewalls.
- **Flexible**—easily modified and updated from any point across the extended enterprise at any moment in time and from virtually any device.

Technology is important, but so are people

We need to learn from the relatively recent history of knowledge management that technology-centricity does not hold all the answers. Knowledge management has evolved from a technology-centric and data-centric view of infrastructure through a process-centric view, to its current people-centric view.

Learning infrastructure for the extended enterprise needs to follow a similar path.

With virtualization of learning infrastructure—cloud-based computing is becoming extremely easy to use and flexible, with support for workplace, social and mobile learning environments—we are seeing opportunities to support the extended enterprise in ways not believed possible years ago.



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