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The State of Online Learning for Enterprises

How to support learning in an ever-changing, technology-enabled world.

Charles Jennings, *70:20:10 Institute*

The Change Imperative

CHANGE IS THE MOST NATURAL OF THINGS.

CHANGE CAN ALSO BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

The quote above from N.R. Narayana Murthy, the 'father of the Indian IT sector' highlights this point.

Narayana Murthy also points out that the alternative to change is even more uncomfortable.

Learning and Development professionals are facing increasing forces of change. New technologies and the emergence of artificial intelligence hold major implications for the way L&D provides services to its stakeholders and internal clients. New understanding of the power of social and informal learning is influencing the role L&D needs to play. Increasing pressures from leadership for L&D to deliver tangible value is demanding new and more effective solutions. Digital transformation is at the top of everyone's agenda and are occupying L&D's mind and resources.

There is no option to stand still.

> "Change is painful.
> But nothing is as painful
> as staying stuck where you do
> not belong."

N.R Narayana Murthy,
Chairman Emeritus of Infosys

The State of the Industry

In its <u>2019 HR/L&D Trend Survey</u>, The Ken Blanchard Companies identified more than 100 initiatives on which leadership, learning and talent development professionals are focusing.

In addressing these, respondents identified six learning modalities they intend to explore/utilize:

30%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON DESIGN THINKING:
DEFINED AS 'A FIVE-STEP SOLUTION-BASED APPROACH TO SOLVING PROBLEMS THAT IS EXTREMELY USEFUL IN TACKLING COMPLEX ISSUES THAT ARE ILL-DEFINED OR UNKNOWN'.
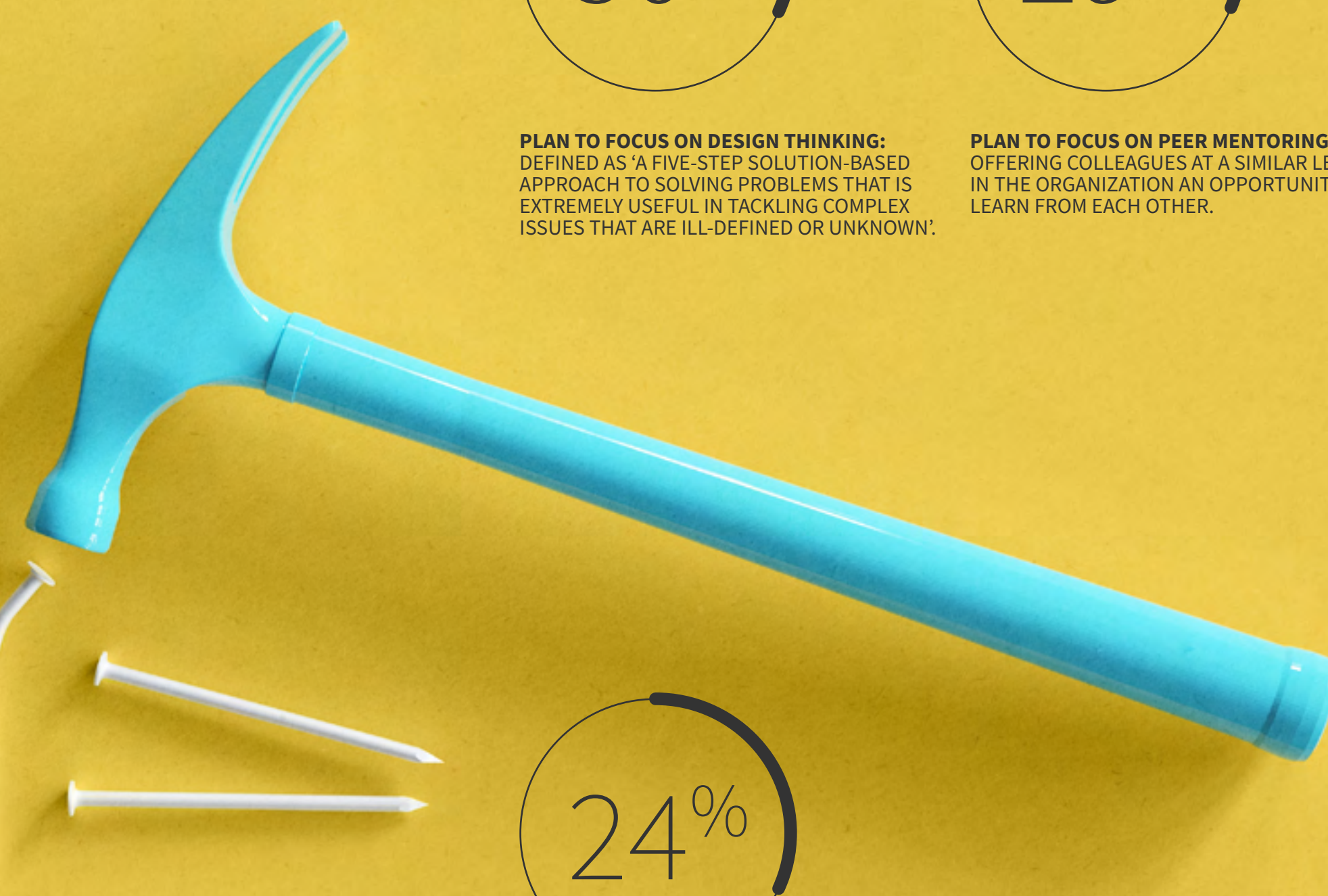
29%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON PEER MENTORING:
OFFERING COLLEAGUES AT A SIMILAR LEVEL IN THE ORGANIZATION AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

33%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON LEARNING AT THE POINT OF WORK: RELATED TO 70/20/10 MODELS AND JUST-IN-TIME LEARNING FOCUSED ON PROVIDING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO SITUATIONS FACED BY EMPLOYEES IN THE MOMENT.

33%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON ADAPTIVE LEARNING:
INCLUDING USING ALGORITHMS TO ORCHESTRATE INTERACTION WITH THE LEARNER TO DELIVER CUSTOMIZED RESOURCES AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES THAT ADDRESS THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF EACH LEARNER.

31%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON DIGITIZATION:
INCLUDING ONLINE LEARNING, AUGMENTED REALITY, MICROLEARNING, ADAPTIVE LEARNING, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES.

24%

PLAN TO FOCUS ON SPACED LEARNING:
DESCRIBED AS 'HIGHLY CONDENSED LEARNING CONTENT THAT IS TYPICALLY REPEATED THREE TIMES WITH TWO 10-MINUTE DISTRACTIVE BREAKS'.

While the results of this survey suggest L&D professionals are looking at a broad range of approaches to meet existing and future demands, a question remains whether HR and L&D departments are well positioned to exploit their role fully as agents of continuous improvement across their organizations.

Despite L&D's intention to extend formal learning solutions, in today's world, L&D needs also to embrace informal learning in order to adapt to an ever-changing and fast-moving environment where learning and working are increasingly intertwined and where learning from working is equally important, if not more so, than learning to work.

Learning From Working

The importance of the workplace as an agent for learning is explained well by the research of Andries de Grip and his colleagues at the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market in The Netherlands.

Professor De Grip's research reports that 'On-the-job learning is more important for workers' human capital development than formal training.

This work also highlights the importance of keeping workers' skills up-to-date through informal learning in the workplace when skill demands change frequently due to technological and organizational innovations.

Further research by de Grip and colleagues has identified new ways of working as being positively related to employee's informal learning. In other words, the changing and increasingly technology-enabled nature of work requires L&D professionals to apply greater focus on informal learning than has been applied to date.

New ways of (technology-enabled) working require new ways of learning.

Informal learning, of course, is not 'new', but applying informal learning principles to deliver improved business value is new to many L&D professionals.

[1] Marsick and Watkins define informal learning broadly as learning that happens "wherever people have the need, motivation and opportunity for learning." Today, informal learning is assumed as all learning that happens outside formal learning constructs – learning by doing, learning from non-interpersonal sources, and learning from others.

The Training Bubble

In the book '702010 Towards 100% Performance' my colleague Jos Arets described Fredrick Winslow Taylor's influence on today's separation of learning and working. Taylor's theory of scientific management, published in 1911, focused on economic efficiency and assumed efficiency was best delivered by high levels of standardization in highly structured organizations. The dominance of structured, formal training interventions and lack of attention to the impact of informal learning is a direct result of this way of thinking. The 'training bubble' emerged from Taylorist thinking in a world that is long past.

Today's world is very different. While the purpose of training is generally to make a measurable contribution to improving organizational results, in practice it is often used differently. The 'training bubble' creates a confusion between goal and purpose.

This small difference can have big consequences.

The purpose of formal training, or any type of learning solution, is usually to achieve a measurable improvement in organizational performance. In practice, the design and execution of training solutions often lose sight of this and the goal is the delivery and measurement of the training itself. As a result, measurement is usually focused on training outcomes using learning metrics rather than being focused on performance outcomes using business metrics.
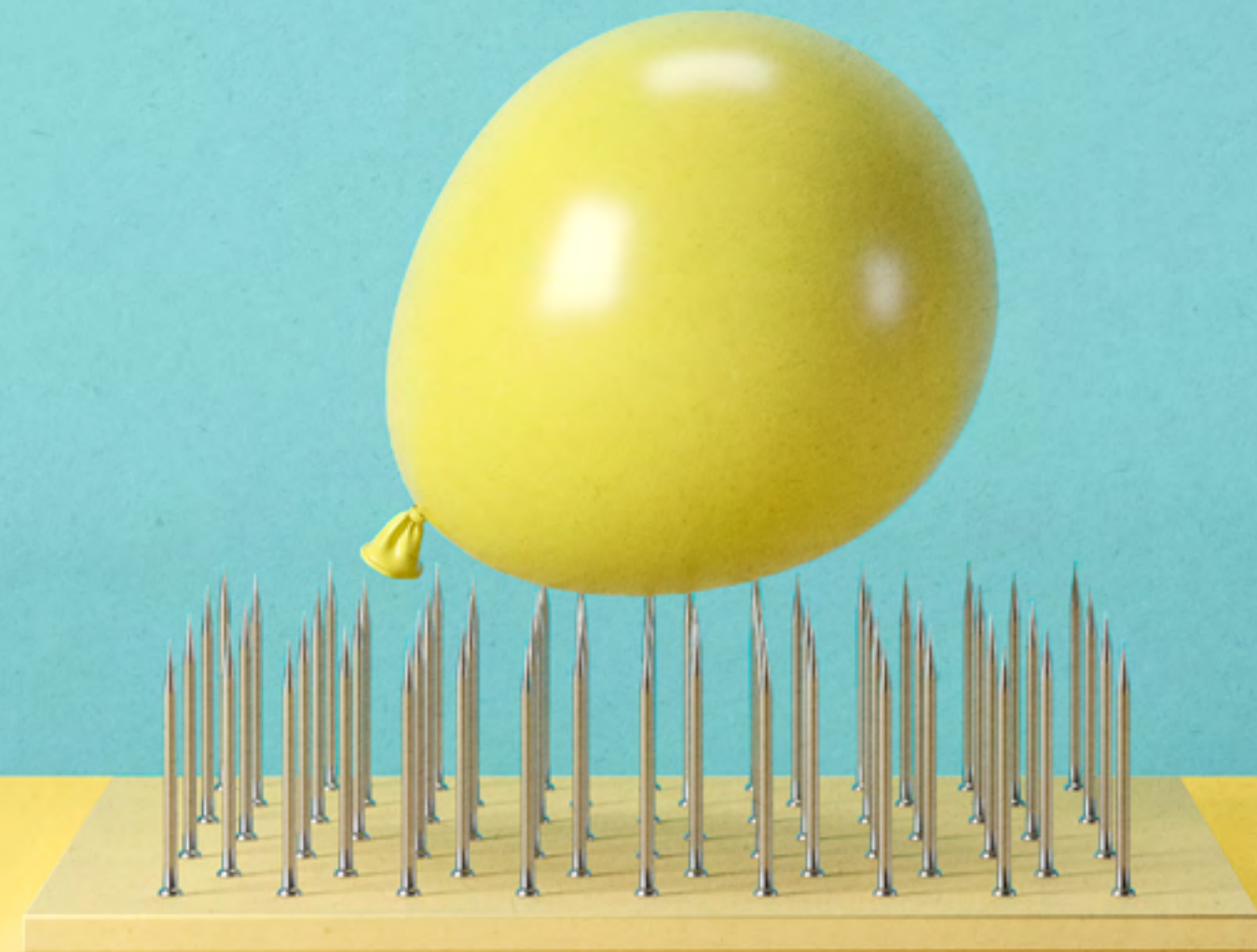
[2] Arets, J. Jennings, C., Heijnen, V. 702010 towards 100% performance. 2016. Sutler Media. ISBN 978-90-823978-3-3
[3] Taylor, F.W., The Principles of Scientific Management. 1911. Routledge, 2003, ISBN 0-415-27983-6
[4] ibid

Remaining Relevant

For L&D to remain relevant, we need to develop new, business-focused and technology-enabled ways to support workers to deliver business results.

This involves exploiting new ways of working, new technologies and machine intelligence.

Twenty years ago, authors Philip Evans and Thomas Wurster described the transfer of information as a "trade-off between richness and reach". Their ground-breaking book Blown to Bits defined reach as referring to the number of people who share particular information, with richness being a more complex concept combining bandwidth, customization, interactivity, reliability, security and currency. Evans and Wurster argue that, with the advent of powerful information and communication technologies, this historic trade-off between richness and reach - in general the greater the reach, the less the richness, and vice-versa - no longer applies. It is now possible to have increasing amounts of both.

The opportunities for L&D to exploit emergent new technologies and machine intelligence to deliver business value are huge.

Beyond automation, the increasing power of machine learning, augmented reality, AI and other new technologies offer L&D a multiplicity of ways to help improve organizational performance and support learning at 'the speed of business.'
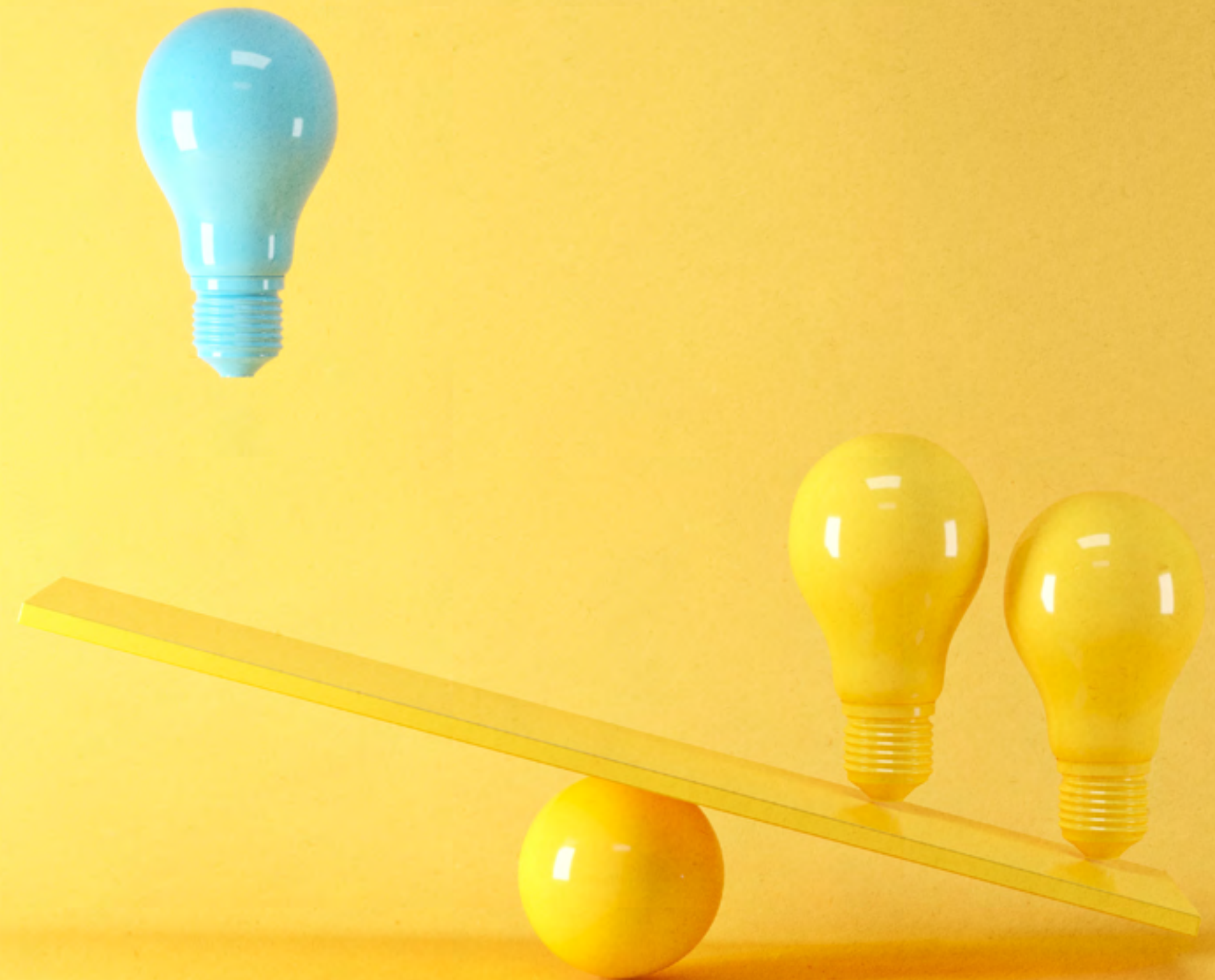
[5] *Evans, P. and Wurster, T.S., Blown to Bits: How the New Economics of Information Transforms Strategy. 1999. Harvard Business Review Press. ISBN 978-0875848778*

Beyond E-learning

E-learning emerged as one of the first steps for using technology to break the richness/reach trade-off.

The increasing granularization of formal learning has been an extension of e-learning over the past 20 years. Although this has resulted in providing marginally easier access to learning content, it fails to address a fundamental issue; e-learning and 'micro-learning' remain formal learning approaches. As do higher bandwidth video-based systems and rich media learning solutions.

There is no doubt that, when used well, these approaches increase the impact of formal learning, but they are not exploiting the full potential of technology to deliver business results. To achieve this, L&D needs to fully embrace informal learning, and learning from working.

Supporting Performance: Where Most Learning Happens

Most of our learning results from our working experiences and requires constant exposure to new situations, practice, the opportunity to react with others, and most importantly, time to reflect.

As a result, learning can occur anywhere and at any time, and often where we least expect it.

Today's L&D department needs to focus on supporting action and output, not on information.

This presents a challenge for many L&D professionals. Careers have been spent designing, developing and delivering content to be 'consumed' by internal or external clients. Over the past 50 years L&D professionals have been engaged in developing primarily content-rich, experience-poor solutions.

Yet, 'learning' is all about activity and experience.

Bringing Working & Learning Together

Eric Kandel won the Nobel Prize for his work on learning and memory. Kandel describes learning as our "ability to acquire new ideas from experience and retain these ideas over time in memory". For Kandel, experience is the key trigger for learning.

One of today's major challenges for L&D professionals is the need to reframe L&D roles to focus on enabling and supporting organizational performance, and to do this it means shifting focus from formal content-rich learning away from the workflow towards an integrated approach where learning is seen as a human benefit from continuous work improvement.

It is known that the closer to the point of use learning occurs, the more effective it is likely to be. This is shown in figure 1 here, from the book 702010 towards 100% performance.

ADD LEARNING IN THE WORK FLOW

REALISED VALUE

CONCEPTUALISE   EXPERIMENT

REFLECT   EXPERIENCE

20 70
INFORMAL AND SOCIAL LEARNING

10
FORMAL LEARNING

SINGLE POINT SOLUTION
LEARNING SEPARATE FROM WORK

CONTINUOS DEVELOPMENT
LEARNING INTEGRATED WITH WORK

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[7] *Kandel. Eric R., The Molecular Biology of Memory Storage: A Dialogue Between Genes and Synapses. 2001. Science. Vol. 294: 1020. www.sciencemag.org*

Exploiting New Technologies, AI to Improve Organizational Performance

Technology has changed everything in our lives. However, L&D's early attempts to improve business results by applying technology to formal learning solutions have delivered only relatively limited results.

A 2017 publication by Thalheimerreported 'a great deal of variability in the research. E-Learning often produces better results than classroom instruction, often produces worse results, often similar results.' Thalheimer reports that the modality is not the prime factor for learning effectiveness in the cases studied, but other factors such as practice, spaced repetitions, real-world contexts and feedback.

A further question to ask is the meaning of 'effectiveness'. In academic studies of technology-supported learning, effectiveness is usually taken to mean the ability to recall information or perform a limited set of tasks in a controlled environment. In other words, using learning metrics to measure learning outcomes. These measures are not of particular interest to executives and chief financial officers.

Possibly L&D's use of technology is being looked at from the wrong perspective. The real value to be created is not learning value but business value.

[8] *Thalheimer, W. (2017) Does eLearning Work? What the Scientific Research Says! Available at http://www.work-learning.com/catalog.html*

Smart Processes, Smart Technologies

Make Learning Your Competitive Advantage

Join 1,500 global organizations who are using Docebo and artificial intelligence to change the way their people learn, produce better learning outcomes and generate measurable business value.

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There are increasing opportunities for L&D to use both smart processes and smart technologies to deliver business value. Performance support (rather than learning support) is a good starting point. The journey from training to performance support is one that every L&D professional and every L&D department should consider making.

This journey is explained in the Docebo whitepaper Performance Support: The Short Way Home by Jos Arets. In this paper, Arets explains the opportunities for expanding L&D's role with performance support in a wide variety of ways.

With performance support approaches underpinned by smart technologies such as intelligent adaptive agents, predictive machine learning and virtual and augmented reality tools, L&D has the capacity to create real business value. The potential for L&D is huge.