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CFO Insights
Creating a continuous learning environment

Advances in technology, shifts in demographics, and the constant competitive necessity to upgrade workforce skills are disrupting corporate learning, including learning in finance. These forces are pushing companies to develop new ways to put employees in charge of the learning experience and foster a culture of learning throughout the organization.

In fact, according to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2016 report, there has been a shift beyond internal programs aimed at developing people to innovative platforms that enable people to develop themselves. Consider that:

- More than eight in 10 executives (84%) in the 2016 survey view learning as an important (40%) or very important (44%) issue (see Figure 1).

- Employees at all levels expect dynamic, self-directed, continuous learning opportunities from their employers.

- Despite the strong shift toward employee-centric learning, many learning and development organizations are still struggling with internally focused and outdated platforms and static learning approaches.

Learning continues to be important to business executives worldwide, including CFOs, as they strive to adapt to the disruptive change that is sweeping through corporate learning and development organizations. And in this issue of *CFO Insights*, we will look at what is behind the push for continuous learning and offer suggestions for how finance chiefs can work with HR to advocate for its delivery.

Drivers of change

Several factors are driving the demand for change that has accelerated to warp speed over the past year.

First, most respondents in the global survey report that their companies are not developing skills fast enough or leaders deeply enough.[1] In today's highly competitive global economy and intensely competitive talent market, the C-suite clearly understands that companies that do not constantly upgrade skills and rapidly build leaders will not be able to execute their business plans.

Second, the ubiquity of always-connected mobile devices makes learning potentially available everywhere and to everyone at any time. Employees can now take a course on nearly any subject online, search for an expert video or podcast to learn a quickly needed skill, and even earn a college degree without leaving their desk—or a couch or coffee shop. This new world of consumer-centric learning helps put employees, not L&D departments, in charge.

Third, employees at all levels now recognize that "the learning curve is the earning curve,"[2] and they are demanding access to dynamic learning opportunities that fit their individual needs and schedules.[3] Millennials and other young employees have grown up in this self-directed learning environment. They often expect it as part of their working lives and careers—and many will move elsewhere if employers fail to provide it.
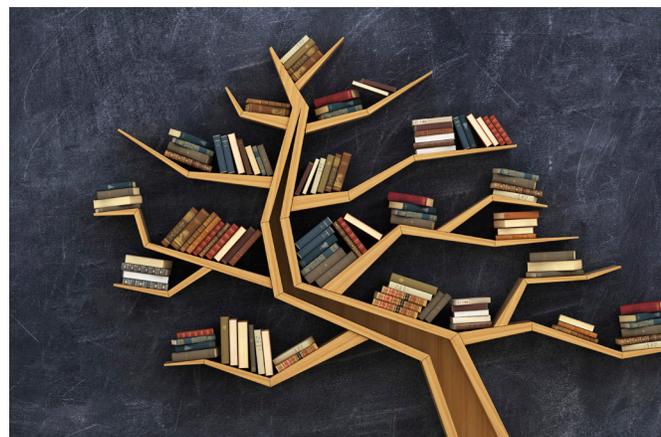
Promoting a new culture of learning

While many organizations are struggling to adapt to these challenges, high-performing companies are seizing the opportunity to promote a new culture of learning (see sidebar, "MasterCard: Lessons from the front lines"). These organizations are fundamentally rethinking what "learning" and "development" mean in the context of their business. They place the employee at the center of a new vision that treats learning as a continuous process, not an episodic event, and as a company-wide responsibility, not one confined to HR.[4]

Supporting this new vision, L&D organizations at these innovative companies are adopting new and expanded learning architectures.[5] They see their role as not simply to push out content they have developed, but to enable employees to access content from a wide range of internal and external sources to create individual learning programs. To facilitate the effort, L&D teams are building internal knowledge-sharing programs, developing easy-to-use portals and video sharing systems, and promoting collaborative experiences that help people constantly learn and share knowledge.

These efforts seek to leverage the profound shifts taking place in the learning industry. Traditional learning management system companies are rapidly evolving in their ability to deliver modern, compelling experiences for learners. Now, a new breed of disruptive platforms is starting to arrive. New money and ideas are pouring into this sector. CB Insights, which tracks venture investments, estimates that more than $3 billion was invested in new learning and educational start-ups in the first six months of 2015. Almost $1 billion of this went into tools, content, and companies that focus on the corporate market.[6]
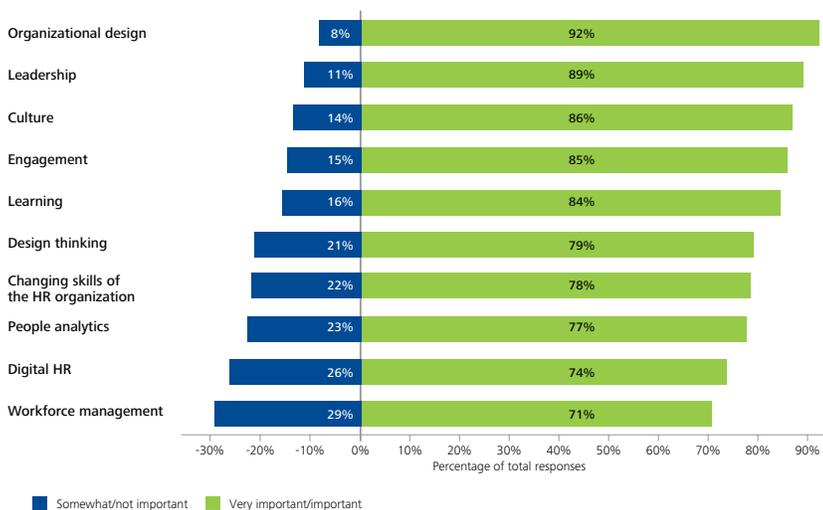
Much of this investment is directed at tools to harness video, new mobile learning apps, and an explosion of content marketplaces. Today, any employee can browse through content from Coursera, Udemy, Udacity, or a dozen other providers and instantly access a lecture, course, or workshop on a needed skill. Such platforms offer learning opportunities at little or no cost and even allow employees to interact online with experts—learning exactly what they need, when they need it.

This kind of technologically enabled, on-demand learning experience is a world away from the traditional learning programs still used by most L&D organizations. In particular, many companies are still struggling to ride the wave and integrate external platforms as part of their employee learning. In Deloitte's global survey, respondents cited a wide range of external learning opportunities that could impact internal development, including external certificates (32%), massive open on-line courses (18%), and external, self-directed learning powered by social media (14%). Still, despite this robust array of choices, 61% of executives report challenges in moving their organizations toward external self-directed learning.

Where companies can start

For those companies that want to move beyond offering programs to curating the learning experience, here are a few ways to get started:

- **Recognize that employee-learners are in the driver's seat:** Learning organizations should think deeply about how the user experiences a company's learning offerings. Employees need to be viewed as customers to be satisfied, rather than as students to be pressured into traditional learning classrooms.

- **Become comfortable with the shift from push to pull:** Switching from a content-centric "push" approach to a learner-centric "pull" approach requires a cultural shift within learning organizations. Giving up full control over learning content, schedules, and platforms may not be easy, but learning organizations that embrace this shift can deliver more effective learning.

- **Use design thinking:** Learning organizations should think less about developing content and more about the month-by-month, day-by-day, and hour-by-hour experience of the learner.

- **Use technology to drive employee-centric learning:** Mobile, social, and web-based platforms that can deliver on-demand learning content are "must-have" capabilities. The best systems can easily integrate any type of digital content and allow learners, as well as learning professionals and business managers, to add and suggest content. Companies should be cautious before investing in massive new systems, and they should monitor developments from innovative vendors to help build effective learning applications.

Figure 1: What trends are shaping the "new organization"?

In its survey of more than 7,000 professionals, Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2016 report identified 10 talent-related issues that are having a profound impact on the way organizations approach people management. The 10 trends are ranked in order of importance below.

Trend	Somewhat/not important	Very important/important
Organizational design	8%	92%
Leadership	11%	89%
Culture	14%	86%
Engagement	15%	85%
Learning	16%	84%
Design thinking	21%	79%
Changing skills of the HR organization	22%	78%
People analytics	23%	77%
Digital HR	26%	74%
Workforce management	29%	71%

Percentage of total responses

■ Somewhat/not important   ■ Very important/important

Source: Global Human Capital Trends 2016; The new organization: Different by design
Graphic: Deloitte University Press | DUPress.com

- **Realign and reengage:** HR and learning leaders must align the learning function with business needs and goals. For many learning teams, doing so can also be an opportunity to reengage with employees, as many learners have stopped looking to their corporate learning departments for training and are already immersed in the enormous range of available digital learning and content.

- **Adopt a learning architecture that supports an expanded vision for development:** Rethink what "development" means in the context of the organization. If such a vision does not yet exist, adopt one and communicate it broadly.

- **Adopt a learning architecture that supports continuous learning:** Dedicate resources, set expectations, and align corporate culture with the goal of enabling employees to get the learning they need, when they need it, at every stage in their careers.

What CFOs can do

In the Q3 2015 *CFO Signals*™ survey, CFOs were asked what their companies were doing to ensure they have the talent they need. CFOs cited a heavy emphasis on new training programs that give top staff the opportunity to learn a variety of technical skills and expand their knowledge in key areas. In addition, they emphasized taking steps to ensure clear career paths for talent with strong leadership potential.[6]

Both of those goals support the move toward continuous learning. But CFOs should also realize that shifting from an internally focused, corporate-centric learning universe to a learner-centric one upends many long-held beliefs in the HR community. Employees inside finance and out will likely find it easier to make this pivot than HR departments because this new world is already part of their mobile, social, and online lives. By partnering with HR leaders, however, CFOs can help promote a new mind-set that puts learners in the driver's seat, harnesses the power of technology and the amazingly diverse wealth of instantly available external content, and offers great user experiences to learners.

*This article was adapted from the chapter entitled "Learning: Employees take charge" in Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2016 report.
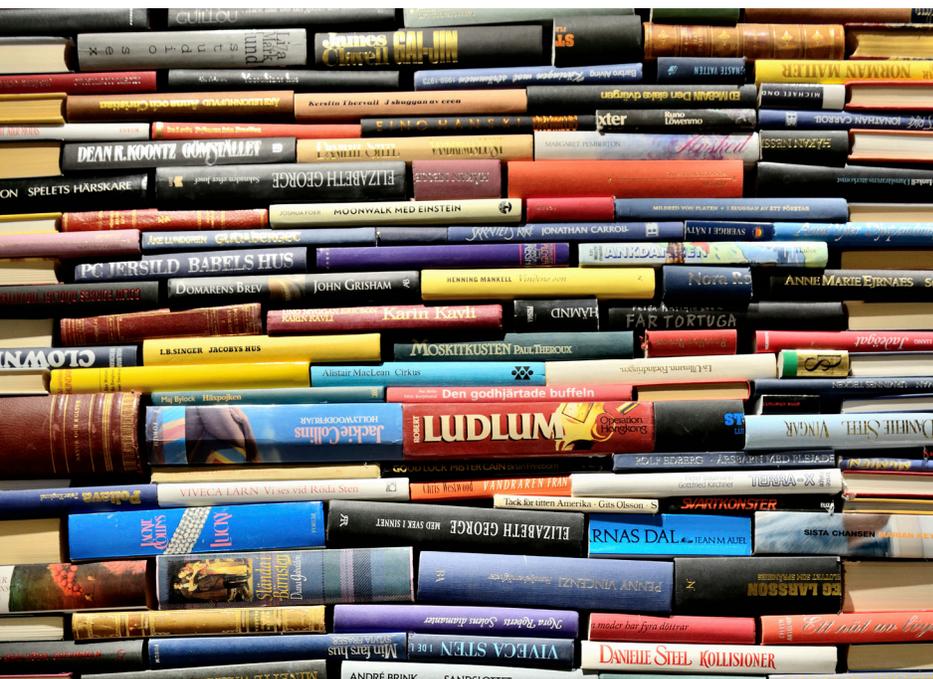
Endnotes

[1] The Conference Board, "The Conference Board CEO Challenge 2016;" https://www.conference-board.org/publications/publicationdetail.cfm?publicationid=6071.

[2] Josh Bersin, "The use of MOOCs and online education is exploding. Here's why;" December 30, 2015; http://joshbersin.com/2015/12/the-use-of-moocs-and-online-education-is-exploding-heres-why/.

[3] Josh Bersin, "Spending on corporate training soars: Employee capabilities now a priority;" *Forbes*, February 2014; http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2014/02/04/the-recovery-arrives-corporate-training-spend-skyrockets/#386ec12c4ab7.

[4] David Mallon and Dani Johnson, *The learning architecture: Defining development and enabling continuous learning*, Bersin by Deloitte, 2014; https://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?id=17435.

[5] Bersin by Deloitte defines a learning architecture as an organization's unique map of agreed-upon learning needs, learning strategies, and delivery strategies for all of its talent. This provides both the L&D function and the business a clear view of what types of problems the organization will solve, what tools they need, and what approaches the organization will take. It deliberately limits the organization's options by deciding how and where the L&D function will focus its efforts—and it builds upon the organization's culture and history of learning (source: Mallon and Johnson, *The learning architecture*).

[6] North American *CFO Signals*™, Q3 2015, CFO Program, Deloitte LLP.

Sidebar: MasterCard: Lessons from the front lines

MasterCard has been on a journey, transforming itself from a traditional payments processing company into a technology company that provides the infrastructure that connects consumers, banks, and businesses.[1] With its underlying business model evolving to address new opportunities and competitive threats, the company is seeking to build capabilities to stay agile and keep new products and services flowing. And with an increasingly diverse workforce—now more than 40% Gen Y—it is becoming harder to engage employees with traditional learning approaches.

Janice Burns, chief learning officer and head of Global Talent Development and Organizational Effectiveness, challenged her team to reinvent their approach to learning by constructing responsive, agile, and personal solutions that would meet the organization's evolving demands along with employees. To do that, she first had to lead a mindset shift within her own organization—away from periodic programs owned by learning professionals to self-directed solutions owned by individual employees. No longer would her learning team focus on telling people what to learn, but instead show them what they can learn, providing access to resources, tools, and connections to enable individuals to do their jobs and build their careers better.

Key to refocusing her team on the individual was segmenting audiences and getting to know their needs, which she did by aligning Global Talent Development (GTD) leaders with specific business units to work with operational leaders. She also empowered her team to experiment with new learning tools and technologies, encouraging them to work lean, fail fast, and scale up successes. Trying something that did not work became acceptable—in some ways a sign of tangible progress toward a culture of innovation.

As they explored new learning formats, the GTD team's attention shifted from traditional courses and programs pushed to employees solely via the learning management system (less important in any high-performing learning organization), to more employee-driven solutions such as mobile performance support, massive open online courses (MOOCs), on-demand micro-learning, and online communities.

One new learning platform taking off with MasterCard's Operations & Technology (O&T) group, for example, is Degreed. The system, which enables self-serve career development, empowers individuals and subject matter specialists to curate their own learning "playlists," mixing and matching internal and external learning content from a variety of sources and formats. Articles, videos, MOOCs, podcasts, and webinars can all be woven together into a personalized learning experience to help employees develop the skills they want to focus on.

The initial feedback from the roll-out to the company's O&T function is promising. Stories highlight that managers and professionals now feel equipped with tools to drive their own development. "I am willing to invest more into the tool because it will follow me no matter where my career takes me," said one systems analyst. Similar feedback will continue to emerge as MasterCard deploys the platform more broadly across the rest of the enterprise.

MasterCard is in the early stages of its journey toward a culture of entrepreneurship and empowerment. However, having the GTD organization act as a living example of this new culture through its own experimental approach has already enabled it to become a meaningful catalyst for change within MasterCard.

[1] Based on client work at MasterCard.

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