

# Learning Is All in the Wrist

BY KATE EVERSON

Wearables, gamification and other technological advances could become major learning tools, as long as CLOs focus on how they improve learning, not just make it flashier.

At Walt Disney World, guests wear their park tickets, charge cards and hotel room keys around their wrists. They're called Magic Bands. The Orlando, Florida, vacation destination assigns its guests the often brightly colored wearable bracelets to enter the park, pay for souvenirs and food, use line-jumping "fast passes" and order on-ride photos. Magic Bands also link to the My Disney Experience app, which tracks where everyone in a group is located within a park to make it easier for meet-ups.

If people can experience this on vacation, why not incorporate such technology into the workplace? As gamification and mobile technologies develop and become more prevalent in employees' personal lives, chief learning officers have opportunities to integrate wearables into learning programs and delivery. The key to doing so successfully is to make sure the focus is not on what the technology does, but on how it supports or improves existing learning objectives.

Stephen Bruce, senior vice president of people affairs at PeopleFluent, said his human resources management software company used to give new employees binders full of information and orientation, which would be forgotten on shelves shortly after they left training. "The concept of online learning literally put [the binder] online, but it never changed the process," he said.

All that information stayed tucked in a corner of the Internet, untouched. That's where technology's omniscience — its ability to create learning opportunities anywhere at any time — comes in handy for learning leaders hoping to reach widespread and info-hungry employees.

## Let Me Check My Wrist

It's hard to leave learning materials on the proverbial shelf when they're literally attached to the wrist. Wearable technology, fitness trackers, smartwatches and optical devices like Google Glass could become a new way for learning leaders to keep employees learning throughout the workday.

Adapting them into learning programs isn't going to happen overnight, however. Even though smartphones are now like mini-laptops with their level of functionality, "we didn't go there when the first iPhone was released," said Joyce O'Donnell Maroney, director of the Workforce Institute at cloud technology company Kronos Inc. "That's something you watch and say, 'OK, how many people are walking around with one of these things in their pockets?'"

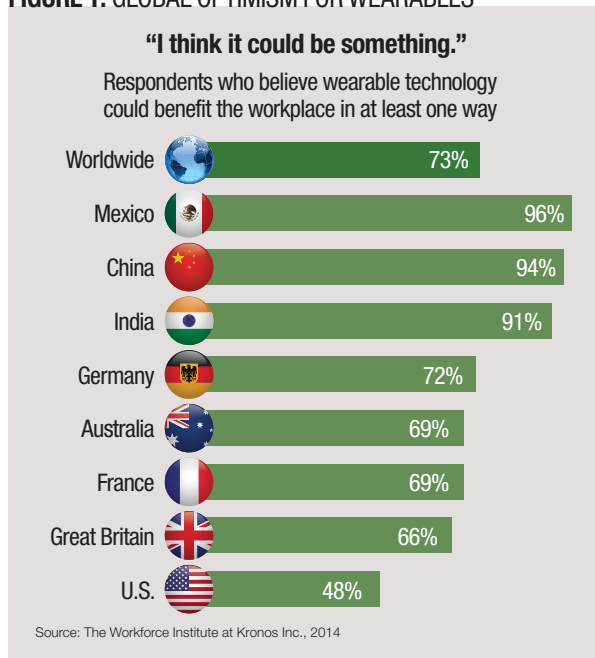
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As much as smartphones grew in use — a Pew Research Institute survey found 58 percent of U.S. adults owned smartphones in 2014 — not everyone sees the next technology trend showing up outside of people’s pockets.

Scott Jordan, founder of clothing designer and manufacturer SCOTTeVEST, built his business around the prediction that people won’t be wearing tech-infused shirts or other wearable gear.

“They have commercial, athletic, medical and industrial applications, but I do not believe the consumer is ever going to really incorporate these wearable technologies into their lifestyles,” he said. “You don’t want to make electronic buying decisions every time you buy a new shirt.”

**FIGURE 1: GLOBAL OPTIMISM FOR WEARABLES**



But a fascination with consumer-owned wearables is already starting, Maroney said. A survey she conducted in 2014 of 9,000 adults worldwide showed 73 percent believe wearables will benefit the workplace in some way, from increasing efficiency to ensuring safety (Figure 1).

“As people get more comfortable with devices in their personal lives, the more likely they’ll be comfortable using them at work,” Maroney said.

Comfort is key to workers accepting workplace wearables. Only 48 percent of U.S. respondents in the survey see such technology benefiting their work. Maroney said this reluctance could be caused by employees’ fear how employers could use personal information collected on a wearable. In the Kronos survey, 35 percent of U.S. respondents said

they had concerns about privacy.

It also might have to do with the cost of the devices — a FitBit costs around \$99 or more, and Google Glass sold for about \$1,500 by the time it went off the market in January. Maroney said a number of respondents said they would be willing to use devices if the company paid for them.

Once employees do get their hands on a wearable — or a wearable around their wrist — learning leaders can track what their employees do most, and therefore what training they require. For instance, Maroney said a retail company could determine how much time workers spend on the sales floor vs. in the stock room, which could alert learning leaders as to whether those employees need to learn more efficient ways to take inventory or better sales tactics to make them more confident working with customers.

Tracker bands might be hot commodities, but more advanced technology like Google Glass is still in its experimental phase. Jan. 19 was the last day Google sold its ocular technology before pulling it off the shelves and back into the lab, planning to develop a new version based on user feedback, good and bad. That doesn’t mean that existing Google Glass and similar devices can’t be incorporated into new learning methods, however.

For example, companies like Wearable Intelligence merged smart eyewear with cameras to help oil workers in the field collaborate with office-bound experts to solve problems and adhere to procedures. The camera gives the expert the same view as the field worker, and the eyepiece diagrams a solution for the worker thanks to augmented reality.

### It’s Real, but It’s Not Real

Daniel Burrus, a technology and business futurist, said augmented reality is another wave of technological advancement that will change the way CLOs deliver learning, despite its slow growth.

Augmented reality is not a new phenomenon, but it is a relatively ignored one. *Esquire* magazine’s December 2009 issue used the technology to take actor Robert Downey Jr. off the cover and onto computer screens, which literally brought the magazine to life as the actor previewed stories inside the new edition.

Now imagine using that same technology — improved over the past five-plus years — to let employees learn. “What if I was teaching someone how to service a new car and work on the engine?” Burrus said. “They could hold up the ARA [augmented reality app] from Lexus and find the names of the parts and get instructions on what to do.”

Burrus said the next step would be to incorporate wearables like Google Glass, which already uses augmented reality, and intelligence agents like Apple Inc.’s Siri into simulations and

everyday job functions. For example, he's been working with Disney to create an e-intelligent agent called Tink. Named after Peter Pan's fairy accomplice, the agent allows all Disney park visitors to ask a Siri-like agent where to find a bathroom, ride or even the nearest Mickey Mouse.

A CLO can create something similar by merging all of this technology together, Burrus said, but it's not enough to simply develop the program using the newest and shiniest technologies. "People ask whether everyone's going to walk around with Google Glass, which is the wrong question," he said. "The better question is, 'Is there a time when people are standing, walking and moving when they could also benefit from using a computer?'"

### Let's Talk, Virtually

One of the main complaints people have about technology is the way it isolates them. Look at any group of commuters on an evening train, and many will have their eyes glued to their phones; they aren't socializing with those around them.

But as much as technology has turned users into screen-staring organisms, other developments have made communicating virtually easier. On-demand learning and message boards, for instance, allow employees more say in what they learn, as well as a way to interact in an otherwise detached learning method.

Also, technology's growing ability to create full access to on-demand learning libraries means employees can get a better view of what other career options are available. This

choose-your-own-adventure style of learning no longer limits them to the training needed for their specific job track; it gives them the opportunity to see what information and skills other positions demand.

Add in a message board or comment section, and employees can share their experiences and what they find useful in their positions. "This concept of the ability to share and broadcast where opportunities lie means job families aren't necessarily a tree, but a hub and spoke," PeopleFluent's Bruce said. "You can branch out, so someone good at demonstrating products may want to get into services, marketing, etc."

The idea of using technology to increase communication isn't lost when it comes to increasingly popular video learning, either. Bob Paulsen, co-founder, president and CEO of PlayerLync, a tablet-based training and development software company, has developed delivery programs that allow workers to watch videos in the palm of their hands and share their solutions with other users on a message board.

One of the greatest challenges, however, is that message boards will get bogged down with inane comments or outdated information. "There has to be some control or management in place so the right people can control the information and people can stay focused," Paulsen said.

### Let's Play a Game

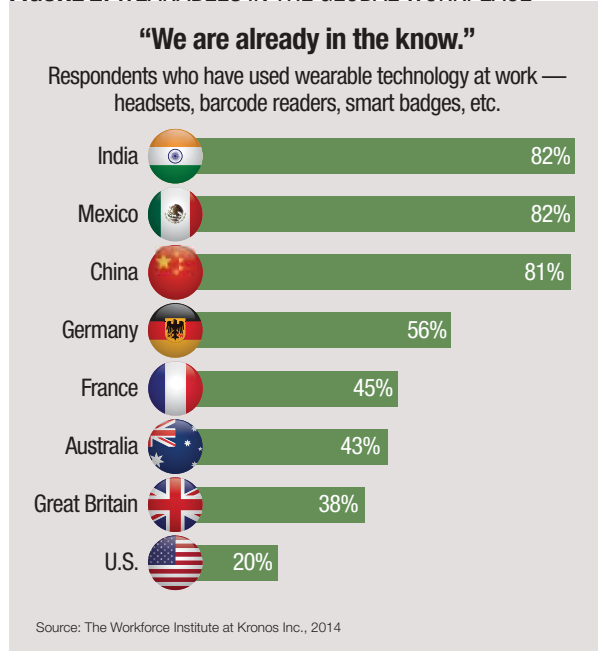
Getting employees to engage with each other may require more than offering a message board. Like the fitness trackers and Disney's Magic Bands in workers' private lives, gamification also has become a trend that entertains outside the workplace — and therefore continues to help connect employees with learning, Maroney said. It has caveats, however.

"You have to make this stuff opt-in," she said. "Not everybody is motivated by gamification challenges." For instance, Allstate Insurance Co. released a game in fall 2013 (See *CLO*, July 2014, p. 42) on privacy policies that received some negative feedback from employees who didn't want to spend their work time playing it.

But Maroney said gamification's popularity is growing. In 2013, gaming research firm M2 Research predicted the gamification market will grow to \$2.8 billion by 2016.

Some of that money may go toward retooling what's already been created. In 2011, information technology research firm Gartner Inc. predicted that 80 percent of existing programs would have to be fixed because of poor design. Burrus said one of the ways to improve a gamer's experience is through advanced simulations, worlds created within screens that can be explored, like a floor of a building that can be patrolled by a gun-toting character controlled by the player. "A Sony PlayStation has these interspatial, three-dimensional environments that can be used for education and

**FIGURE 2: WEARABLES IN THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE**



training rather than just blow-'em-up games," he said.

The next step is to take these popular game formats and turn them into collaborative learning experiences that encourage employees to compete in a virtual world that teaches them more about their jobs. But don't think of this new emphasis on gamification as a "Glengarry Glen Ross" situation where the first prize is a Cadillac, the second a set of steak knives and the third a pink slip. It has to be fun, engaging and addictive, even without fancy graphics.

Maroney said social competition already exists in everyone's life, be it "Candy Crush" or simply gaining "likes" on Facebook. Extending it to learning in the workplace can increase engagement.

For example, a car company could get its national sales force competing through a game platform that tests its vehicle inventory knowledge as well as the competition's products. "That's a lot to learn, and if it's pushed in a passive way, your salespeople aren't going to be that good," Burrus said.

"But if you get national sales force competing, you're going to have more success."

Like wearables, augmented reality and virtual communication, gamification's popularity rests in how it's used in employees' private lives, as well as at the office. "As people become more and more comfortable with using these technologies in their personal lives, we're going to pull the commercial technology world into these applications because they're going to expect it," Maroney said.

Even if learners are on board, it's up to learning leaders to make sure they're integrated in a way that improves the way they deliver development.

"Whatever you're looking at, the key here is: Are you maximizing the technology to accelerate the learning?" Burrus said. "How can I use technology to transform how I train or educate?" **CLO**

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