



## THE LEARNING FUNCTION MUST MOVE BEYOND CONTENT CREATION.

### CULTIVATING SUBJECT MATTER NETWORKS

**T**he Internet has permeated what we do socially, professionally and educationally to such an extent that we have become desensitized to the profound changes it has brought to how we connect, communicate, coordinate, collaborate and take collective action.

Like the nation-states of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, modern-day enterprises that cannot sense and respond in real time to meet the needs of an increasingly informed, connected and engaged set of stakeholders may find themselves becoming increasingly irrelevant to the constituencies they employ and serve. To overcome digital Darwinism, companies must develop the capability to tap into the resource nodes within their enterprise networks in more responsive and dynamic ways.

Enabling the enterprise to rapidly coalesce capability around unanticipated market opportunities or stakeholder issues is the pre-eminent challenge for the learning function in the 21st century. To meet this challenge the learning function's focus and value proposition must extend beyond productive learning (i.e., teaching people how to do things we know how to do to cut costs), to also nurturing generative learning (i.e., enabling the enterprise network to develop ideas and concepts that grow revenue).

Generative learning is socially constructed. It feeds on context and social interaction to channel human intuition toward rapid collective sense-making around a given opportunity or challenge. Human networks create a meaningful context within which content can be consumed and digested to create agency and value. In the past, content was king. Today, context is the kingdom. The

remit of the learning function must move beyond content creation to include context curation.

What if the primary focus of the learning function was to nurture the development of subject matter networks throughout the enterprise network? What if the primary focus of learning professionals was to facilitate generative learning in which the full collaborative force of the enterprise network is wielded to build relationships and foster innovation among resource nodes within and across the enterprise? How would this change what we do and how we are perceived by the organization we serve?

The primary challenge for learning leadership over the next few years will be to reinvent the function to drive the innovation agenda of the organization that it serves. Attempting to address this innovation agenda with more efficient productivity-focused training strategies and technologies is akin to attempting to play tennis with a golf club. The tool is not suited to the reality of the challenge at hand.

Too often, past successes institutionalize core rigidities that hamper future transformation and growth. For the learning function this has been true for centuries. Today, unlearning those traditional strategies and approaches that have served the function well up to this point may be the only way to ensure that we remain relevant and valuable to the modern day dynamic networked organization.

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