

# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON 70:20:10

**A GoodPractice Research Paper**

By Stef Scott, Content and Lead Research Editor  
and Owen Ferguson, Product Development Director

## FOREWORD

GoodPractice have consistently focused on improving the performance of leaders and managers by providing on-demand learning resources in the workplace. When we launched the company in 2000, there was no language to describe what we did or why it might be effective.

Working with clients, we found it was extremely effective. Slowly, terminology and models have emerged to support and explain the practice. First was 'informal learning', then 'performance support' and, most recently, the '70:20:10 framework'.

Through our work with many L&D teams, we've seen the increased adoption of the 70:20:10 framework to support workplace learning. Although it has become an oft-quoted mantra that has captured the attention of the L&D community, it is perhaps not always fully understood.

So while interest in 70:20:10 is growing, a solid agreement on how the framework can best be used appears to be lacking. We have also found that, frequently, L&D faces something of a challenge when it comes to applying the underlying principles of 70:20:10 to an organisation's strategy for workplace learning.

This excellent report by Stef and Owen aims to address and clarify some of these issues and, most importantly, provide practical guidance on how to apply the ideas successfully.

As the report makes clear, the 70:20:10 framework is, at its heart, about a learning mindset and it provides a wonderful catalyst for reviewing and changing an organisation's learning provision. As our summary concludes: 'These are exciting times to be involved in L&D, as the opportunity to empower people to take control of their learning has never been greater.'

**Peter Casebow**  
**GoodPractice CEO**  
**November 2014**

## Acknowledgements

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 About the report

This report begins with an introduction to the 70:20:10 framework for learning and development. We review the research and literature that has emerged to date on 70:20:10, charting the early development of the framework and its recent rise to prominence across the L&D landscape.

The second section looks at the use of 70:20:10 in organisations today, and presents the views and thoughts of some leading L&D thinkers and practitioners. We give a range of perspectives on 70:20:10 and cover its major criticisms.

In the third and final section, we offer some practical suggestions for how L&D practitioners can bring the underlying principles of 70:20:10 to life in their organisation. We look at how 70:20:10 can best support an overarching strategy for learning, and boost informal learning and social learning activities in a positive way.

An overview of the research methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

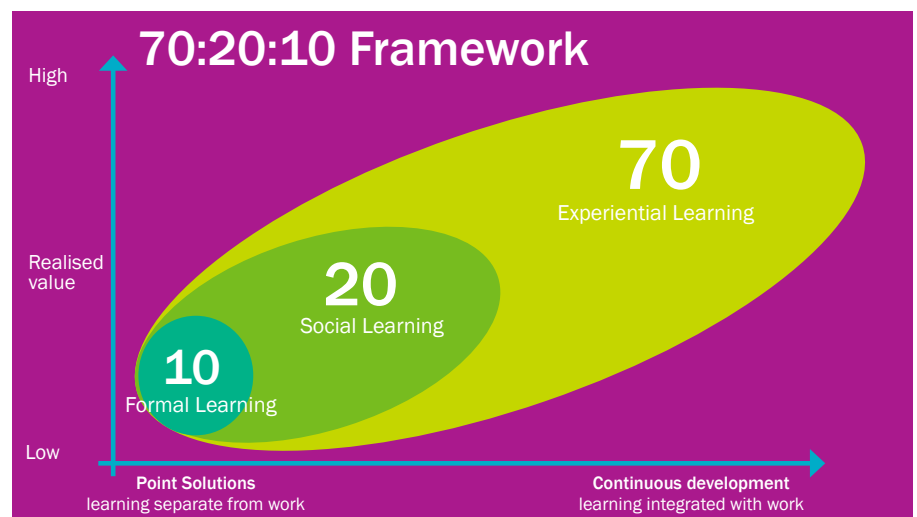
## 1.2 What is 70:20:10?

70:20:10 is a learning and development framework which sets out a rationale for how employees learn. It states that:

- 70% of our learning comes from **challenging assignments** and **on-the-job experiences**
- 20% of our learning is developed from **our relationships with other people**, our networks and the **feedback we receive**
- 10% of our learning is derived from **formal training**, such as courses and **workshops**

At its heart, 70:20:10 highlights that people get the majority of the skills and knowledge they need to do their job from on-the-job learning experiences, rather than from classroom or course-based learning. There are many different interpretations of what 70:20:10 is, including the terms 'model', 'framework', 'ratio', 'method' and 'rule'. For the purpose of this report, we refer to it as the 70:20:10 framework throughout.

It can be illustrated as follows:



Charles Jennings, 2014

### 1.3 Origins of 70:20:10 and rise to prominence

A review of the literature shows that the origins of what is now known as the 70:20:10 framework can be traced to a number of sources. An early reference was made by Professor Allen Tough in his 1968 study *Why Adults Learn*.<sup>1</sup> He found that most adult learning is self-directed. Although he didn't refer directly to 70:20:10, Tough's later work in the 1980s began to bring the idea together more coherently. It identified that around "70% of all learning projects are planned by the learner himself."<sup>2</sup>

Important parallels can be drawn with Jay Cross's widely-referenced 80:20 model of learning. This states that, on average, around 80% of work-related learning in an organisation is informal, and around 20% is formal.<sup>3</sup> Cross outlines a plethora of research which appears to confirm these broad ratios. He attributes the original source of the 80% informal learning figure to Peter Henschel at the Institute for Research on Learning.

As Cross explains, Henschel's work found that "80% or more of corporate learning is found to be informal."<sup>4</sup> An international expert on informal learning, Cross has since led the way in questioning the strong emphasis that organisations have traditionally placed upon formal learning. He has also called for a realignment of L&D thinking in order to support informal learning activity.

The bulk of the credit for developing 70:20:10 as a formal framework is attributable to the authors Morgan McCall, Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger at the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina. Based on the results of research they conducted with senior business executives about the factors they felt made them successful, their 1996 publication, *The Career Architect Development Planner*, set out the ways in which people learn, using the 70:20:10 format for the first time.<sup>5</sup>

They found that over the course of their careers, the most successful executives had gained their most valuable learning in the following ways:

- 70% from tough jobs and assignments
- 20% from other people (mainly their manager)
- 10% from going on courses and reading

<sup>1</sup> Tough, A. *Why Adults Learn: A Study of the Major Reasons for Beginning and Continuing a Learning Project* (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Tough, A. *The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning* (Toronto Institute for Studies in Education, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Cross, J. (2006) *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways That Inspire Innovation and Performance* (John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Jay Cross and The Internet Time Group, "Where did the 80% come from?" Available at: <http://www.informl.com/where-did-the-80-come-from/> (accessed 25 October 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Eichinger, R. Lombardo, M. *The Career Architect Development Planner* (Lominger Ltd, 1996).

## 1.4 Building on 70:20:10

Since then, others have built upon the initial research that provided a basis for the 70:20:10 framework. The work of Charles Jennings, a leading thinker in this area, is perhaps most notable. He has helped to turn 70:20:10 from a conceptual set of numbers into a practical tool, which is more relevant for today's L&D practitioners. Jennings has written and co-authored a number of key reports which have helped to bring 70:20:10 into sharp focus. In *70:20:10 Framework Explained* and *Effective Learning With 70:20:10*, Jennings provides a comprehensive overview of the framework. More importantly, he offers sound practical advice on how organisations can best implement 70:20:10 to deliver better learning experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Other notable contributors to the debate include Dan Pontefract, who presents an alternative to the 70:20:10 framework in his book *Flat Army*<sup>7</sup>. The book is primarily about reversing the traditional command and control style of leadership that has held sway for so long in many organisations. It aims to help leaders create a collaborative culture for their organisation, which will engage, empower and encourage all employees. As part of the Flat Army approach, Pontefract discusses the realities of how people learn, arguing that this is different from the methodology set out by the 70:20:10 framework.

He stresses that learning is pervasive, which is:

*“The switch from a ‘training is an event’ fixed mindset, to ‘learning is a collaborative, continuous, connected and community-based’ mindset.”<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, C. *70:20:10 Framework Explained* (2013). Available at: <https://www.702010forum.com/about-702010-publication> (accessed 20 October 2014) and Jennings, C. and Wagnier, J. *Effective Learning With 70:20:10*, CrossKnowledge White Paper (January 2012). Available at: [http://www.crossknowledge.com/en\\_GB/elearning/media-center/news/702010.html](http://www.crossknowledge.com/en_GB/elearning/media-center/news/702010.html) (accessed 10 October 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Pontefract, D. *Flat Army: Creating a Connected and Engaged Organization*, (Wiley Sons, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Pontefract's 3:33 model of pervasive learning presents an alternative perspective on the reality of how we learn and how leadership is formed. It suggests that:

- 33% of learning happens by formal means (e.g. in a physical or virtual classroom, at conferences and roadshows and via e-learning)
- 33% is informal (e.g. via mentoring, coaching, webinars, reading books and case studies, listening to podcasts and role shadowing)
- 33% is social (e.g. via user-generated content, wikis, blogs, videos, discussions, comments, ratings and instant messaging tools etc.)



Dan Pontefract, 2013

## 2. 70:20:10 TODAY

### 2.1 Why learning leaders are interested in 70:20:10

It is fair to say that 70:20:10 has captured the attention of the L&D world, both in the UK and internationally, in a big way. Since the publication of Jay Cross's *Informal Learning*, the L&D industry as a whole has been abuzz with change.<sup>9</sup> The book describes workplace learning as something that happens naturally, as people find out how best to do their jobs by working through day-to-day-challenges. People learn informally by trial and error, from talking to their colleagues, engaging with a subject-specific forum or phoning a help desk. In short, informal learning has a major impact on a person's ability to do their job by providing answers when and where they are needed.

The more recent interest in 70:20:10 can be considered as an extension of Cross's view of informal learning. The 70:20:10 framework is seen by many commentators as a way for the L&D function to achieve transformational change and move away from its historically strong focus on formal learning activities.

For this research, we felt it was important to ask our interviewees to comment on why they felt 70:20:10 had picked up such a high level of interest from those responsible for delivering organisational learning. As Nigel Paine comments:

*"70:20:10 puts a framework on something that is blindingly obvious, which is that a learning event isn't the whole story about learning. We're talking about three areas that comprise the learning experience, and that's why people are interested."*<sup>10</sup>

Charles Jennings points to the simplicity of 70:20:10 itself as a catalyst for change across the whole L&D function:

*"L&D people (and other people outside the learning function) see it as a really simple way to change. It's actually a change agent. It's really simple to get the message across to people that it's about expanding learning, extending learning beyond classes. It's accepting that learning is a process, and not a series of events."*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cross, J. *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways that Inspire Innovation and Performance* (John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> GoodPractice interview with Nigel Paine, conducted by Stef Scott (13 October 2014).

<sup>11</sup> GoodPractice interview with Charles Jennings, conducted by Stef Scott (8 October 2014). Charles is a recognised international expert on 70:20:10. Former Global Head of Learning at Thomson Reuters, he has written and co-authored many reports on this topic and also founded the 70:20:10 Forum.



Harold Jarche points out that L&D's traditional role has hindered the scope of its organisational value. Viewing workplace learning through the lens of 70:20:10 can provide a solution for L&D functions that need to broaden their approach:

*“One of the problems is that L&D, in a lot of cases, has become a deliverer of products and not a co-solver of problems. 70:20:10 puts formal instruction where it belongs, which is as a very targeted and focused type of intervention. It says that even if you are building the best courses and things like that, you are still only dealing with 10%. What are you doing with the other 90%?”*<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned above, Clive Shepherd agrees that part of the interest in 70:20:10 stems from the narrow nature of L&D's traditional training delivery role. He points out that many L&D functions have had a blinkered focus, which has primarily been about designing and delivering formal training, often from a handbook or coursebook. He argues that this kind of L&D function cannot influence the majority of learning that is already happening across organisations; the 70% that comes from our on-the-job experiential learning, and the 20% that is derived from our experiences and relationships with other people.<sup>13</sup>

Harold Jarche takes this a step further, pointing out:

*“If you (meaning L&D), don't understand the business, if you're not connected to the organisation and what's happening to people, then you're not doing your job in supporting learning. It's understanding the 70:20 of 70:20:10. That's 90% of workplace learning. If you're not involved in that, then you're pretty well irrelevant.”*<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 Benefits of 70:20:10

In recent years, 70:20:10 has moved from the fringes of the L&D landscape to rapidly take hold as a mainstream idea. For many, the most important benefit to be gained from 70:20:10 is that it encourages L&D practitioners to shift their mindset on how to approach the delivery of learning in their organisation.

70:20:10 offers a framework that enables L&D practitioners to critically assess their existing practice of learning delivery. It asks them to consider whether they are addressing and appropriately supporting all areas where people engage in learning. Based on the 70:20:10 rationale, L&D must use evidence to inform and adapt its approach.

<sup>12</sup> GoodPractice interview with Harold Jarche, conducted by Stef Scott (17 October 2014). Harold is current chairman of the Internet Time Alliance and an independent L&D consultant based in Canada. Find out more at: <http://jarche.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> GoodPractice interview with Clive Shepherd, conducted by Stef Scott (20 October 2014). Clive is an expert in the field of workplace learning and author of The New Learning Architect. Find out more at: <http://clive-shepherd.blogspot.co.uk/>.

<sup>14</sup> GoodPractice interview with Harold Jarche, conducted by Stef Scott (17 October 2014).

The majority of our interviewees were in agreement that 70:20:10 could offer organisations and their L&D functions a way of improving what they deliver for their stakeholders. Not only does it provide a strong impetus for change, it also offers a mechanism through which current L&D practice can be examined and assessed. As Charles Jennings points out, 70:20:10 helps both learning functions and organisations become much more intentional about how they build high performance:

*“It gives them a structure in which they can focus on building a culture of continuous development and high performance.”<sup>15</sup>*

We've seen that 70:20:10 can be used as a prism through which L&D can examine and assess its current spread of learning interventions and activities. It is important to recognise that 70:20:10 is not about ignoring the 70 and 20 areas 'because they are happening anyway', but to instead think about how best to support and cultivate these learning activities.

It prompts identification of gaps in learning provision, helping L&D to prioritise the development and implementation of learning initiatives to support the different areas of the 70:20:10 framework. It does not mean that L&D should allocate 70% of its time to developing ways of boosting on-the-job experiential learning, 20% to developing networks of experts and communities of practice and 10% to course development, but rather that each of these areas should be reviewed and supported in a way which takes account of learners' needs and requirements.

## 2.3 Criticisms of 70:20:10

Alongside all the enthusiasm and positive interest we have seen in 70:20:10, it is apparent that there are also some significant problems - the framework is not without its critics. There has been something of a backlash not only from L&D practitioners themselves, but also from a number of L&D experts and authorities.

In recent years, a number of people have identified various flaws and problems associated with 70:20:10, with varying degrees of voracity. The following sections take a look at some of the key criticisms of the framework. Bearing these in mind, our interviewees agreed that misconceptions often arise when organisations start getting to grips with 70:20:10, which limit its overall usefulness.

<sup>15</sup> GoodPractice interview with Charles Jennings, conducted by Stef Scott (8 October 2014).

### 2.3.1 Using the numbers as a prescription

One of the major criticisms of 70:20:10 concerns how the framework can be misinterpreted by organisations and their L&D teams. The danger is that people view the ratios as a strict 'prescription' rather than something which can be applied more fluidly and flexibly.

For example, Nigel Paine notes the following anecdotal evidence about the way 70:20:10 can be misused:

*“The worst elements are people who are determined to get the boxes full up, so they look for the 70% and they look for the 20% and they’re not happy until they’ve managed to produce something and say, ‘Well, we’ve now got our 70% of this, and 20% of that.’ People who over-simplify it get into trouble.”*

Furthermore, Donald Clark, a contributor to this debate, has also voiced what he calls 'lingering doubts' regarding the highly prescriptive nature of 70:20:10.<sup>16</sup> He strongly advises against using 70:20:10 as the basis for an organisation's learning strategy.<sup>17</sup> This view is echoed by Clive Shepherd, who says that caution should be exercised when it comes to estimating the scope and relevance of 70:20:10. He argues that if 70:20:10 has any practical use, it is not as a prescription for future projects but as a way of reflecting back on a period of career development and thinking about what we have learned and how we learned it.<sup>18</sup>

In relation to this point, the Australian researchers who worked on the Demystifying 70:20:10 research report found that while the original three areas outlined in the framework were valid, organisations that tried to apply them in a strict way had considerably less success than those that chose a more flexible approach and used 70:20:10 as a broad guideline.<sup>19</sup>

In our interview, Nigel Paine talked about that fact that 70:20:10 has become something of an L&D mantra that is often quoted by practitioners without an understanding of the fact that their practice needs to change. He reflected that:

*“Some L&D people go around saying, ‘Oh yes, we’re doing 70:20:10’ without actually getting at changing the learning itself.”<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> There are two individuals named Donald Clark who are key contributors and influencers across the L&D profession. Please note that the Donald Clark quoted in this report is the US-based author of the 'Big Dog Little Dog' blog, and not the UK-based.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Clark and former CEO of Epic Donald Clark, 'Lingering Doubts About the 70:20:10 Model', Big Dog and Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition blog. Available at: <http://bdld.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/lingering-doubts-about-702010-model.html> (accessed 27 October 2014).

<sup>18</sup> GoodPractice interview with Clive Shepherd, conducted by Stef Scott (20 October 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Kajewski, K. and Madsen, V. Demystifying 70:20:10 White Paper, DeakinPrime (Deakin University, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> GoodPractice interview with Nigel Paine, conducted by Stef Scott (8 October 2014). Former Head of People Development at the BBC, Nigel is a well known learning and development writer, speaker and consultant. He is author of The Learning Challenge. Find out more at: <http://www.nigelpaine.com/>.

### 2.3.2 Lack of empirical evidence

Another criticism often levelled at 70:20:10 is the perception that there is an apparent lack of evidence available to confirm the validity of the concept. Critics maintain that 70:20:10 was only developed as a theoretical hypothesis, which hasn't been rigorously tested and proved by empirical evidence. For example, commentators such as Ben Betts and Nick Howe argue that there is a distinct lack of peer reviewed literature available to corroborate the underlying basis of 70:20:10.<sup>21</sup> Writing in the Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organisations, researchers from the University of Michigan asserted that:

*“There is actually no empirical evidence supporting this assumption, yet scholars and practitioners frequently quote it as if it is fact.”<sup>22</sup>*

Furthermore, the results of the aforementioned study by researchers from Deakin University into the origins of 70:20:10 appear to corroborate the view that there is:

*“A lack of empirical data supporting 70:20:10 as well as a lack of concrete certainty about the origin.”<sup>23</sup>*

Despite these misgivings, the majority of interviewees who participated in this research felt that a firm research base confirming the validity of the 70:20:10 concept does exist. Some of the interviewees felt that this discussion and debate about the supposed origins of 70:20:10 and the credibility of the research on which it is based actually miss the point about why it is so important.

As Nigel Paine explains:

*“There’s been a whole bunch of arguments about 70:20:10: its not proven, validated research, and that it’s composed of ridiculously round figures and all that nonsense. We’re not talking about scientifically proven ratios ... it’s the broad concept of learning that is important.”<sup>24</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, and Nick Howe, 'Let's kill a few learning holy cows - 70:20:10 is dead (or at least seriously ill) (9 May 2010). Available at: [www.nickjhowe.com/2010/05/lets-kill-a-few-learning-holy-cows/](http://www.nickjhowe.com/2010/05/lets-kill-a-few-learning-holy-cows/) (accessed 27 October 2014).

<sup>22</sup> D. Scott DeRue and Christopher G. Meyers, 'Leadership Development: A Review and Agenda for Future Research'. In D. V. Day (ed.) Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Kajewski, K. and Madsen, V. Demystifying 70:20:10 White Paper, DeakinPrime (Deakin University, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> GoodPractice interview with Nigel Paine, conducted by Stef Scott (8 October 2014).

### 2.3.3 Dangers of extrapolation

Critics have also drawn attention to what they regard as apparent weaknesses with the purported original source of 70:20:10: The Center for Creative Leadership's 1996 study.<sup>25</sup> The original research sample was comprised of a relatively small number of senior managers. They were asked to look back over their careers and determine where they felt their most meaningful development came from.

The results gave us the 70:20:10 framework as we know it today. However, critics point out the dangers of simply extrapolating the results of this study and using them as a panacea for how everyone in the workplace (not just senior executives) learns.<sup>26</sup>

Building on this issue, Donald Clark warns that because 70:20:10 was primarily intended as a prescriptive remedy for developing managers to senior and executive positions, it shouldn't be regarded as a useful model for developing skills in the daily learning and workflow of everyone in an organisation. He warns that this is using the framework in a completely different context than it was originally designed for.<sup>27</sup>

The dangers of not applying a situational context to 70:20:10 are also echoed by Clive Shepherd, who says:

*"[70:20:10 is] not situational. It is important to recognise that, in reality, the ratio of informal to formal learning varies with the context in which learning is taking place."*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Eichinger, R. and Lombardo, M. The Career Architect Development Planner (Lominger Ltd, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Lorri Freifeld, 'Fear not the 70:20:10' Training Mag (14 September 2012). Available at: <http://www.trainingmag.com/content/fear-not-70-20-10> (accessed 29 October 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Donald Clark, '70:20:10 Versus the 3-33 Pervasive Learning Model' Big Dog and Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition blog. Available at: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/media/70-20-10.html> (accessed 29 October 2014).

<sup>28</sup> GoodPractice interview with Clive Shepherd, conducted by Stef Scott (20 October 2014).

## 2.4 The future of 70:20:10

Given the current prominence of 70:20:10 across the L&D world, we asked our interviewees to comment on what they felt the future held for the framework. Whether they were supportive of the framework or not, everyone agreed it was here to stay. Despite the various criticisms and concerns that have been raised about the evidence for 70:20:10 and how it has been interpreted, the interviewees felt it was unlikely that it could be dismissed as simply another L&D fad or fashion.

The fact that 70:20:10 has gained such a level of interest and popularity, not just across L&D, but with organisational leaders as well, means it is likely to continue to filter down and influence L&D practitioner thinking across many organisations.

Charles Jennings feels that 70:20:10 will gradually become perceived as a catalyst or external trigger for change across L&D, rather than simply gaining interest as a framework or idea. However, there is a risk that due to 70:20:10's increasing exposure and the ease with which it can be misinterpreted, it could potentially fall out of favour in the same way as Albert Mehrabian's incorrectly generalised 55:38:7 rule of verbal and nonverbal communications.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this confidence in the future of 70:20:10, many of the interviewees said that in order for organisations to gain further value, the framework needs to evolve in some way. At the present time, 70:20:10 is not derived from use and practice, and this needs to change.

As Jane Hart says:

*“The way I think it needs to evolve is to become bit more practical, and provide some really useful examples which show people how to put it into practice.”<sup>30</sup>*

The other interviewees agreed that concrete examples of how to implement 70:20:10 would be helpful in widening its appeal. As Harold Jarche points out, practical ways to support and boost the 70 and 20 elements of the framework are the most important. L&D also needs to find a way to put learning back into the hands of the learners themselves, by creating a culture which is less about spoon feeding people courses, and more about giving them control over their own learning. The rise of phrases and sentiments such as ‘do-it-yourself’ learning, ‘taking control’ of learning and ‘personal knowledge mastery’ are examples of the shift in people’s attitudes and mindsets towards what learning needs to be.<sup>31</sup>

As 70:20:10 gains traction, L&D functions will need an infusion of new skills and competencies. Although organisations will already provide a range of formal learning initiatives, work is required to understand how best to support the 70 and the 20 elements as well.

As Peter Casebow, GoodPractice CEO, points out:

*“Some L&D practitioners seem to see 70:20:10 as a threat and they fear losing control of learning. They’re resistant to change and miss the point that the 70 and the 20 are happening anyway. The real question is whether you can support and enable them.”*

From our perspective, it is clear that the role of the L&D practitioner is set to evolve, and will become more about setting the right conditions and culture in which all of the elements of 70:20:10 can flourish.

<sup>29</sup> Mehrabian’s research aimed to understand the impact of verbal and nonverbal communications. His original research is often oversimplified and taken out of its original context.

<sup>30</sup> GoodPractice interview with Jane Hart, conducted by Stef Scott (17 October 2014). Jane is founder of the Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies. She is also an independent advisor, writer and speaker. Find out more at: <http://c4lpt.co.uk/jane-hart/>.

<sup>31</sup> GoodPractice interview with Harold Jarche, conducted by Stef Scott (17 October 2014).

## 3. PRACTICAL TIPS FOR USING 70:20:10

### 3.1 Using 70:20:10

It's clear that 70:20:10 is based on theory, rather than something that has emerged from L&D practice itself. Because of this, L&D practitioners can sometimes find it a challenge to identify effective ways of putting 70:20:10 to work in their organisation.

While there are tools available to help L&D put the framework to practical use, further examples and case studies showing how 70:20:10 can be brought to life are needed. This section provides an insight into how the principles of 70:20:10 can be implemented, using examples drawn from the research interviews and existing case studies.

We know that the 70 element of 70:20:10 (informal on-the-job learning) is already taking place within organisations, as is the 20 element, which comes from interacting with and learning from other people. The questions for L&D are how to make this learning easier for people, and how best to support and leverage it wherever possible.

Practical suggestions on how to do this include:

#### 3.1.1 Changing mindsets about learning

One of the most important areas for L&D to consider when first looking at 70:20:10 is how people in their organisation currently think about the learning process, and what it means to them. Charles Jennings talks about the importance of 'developmental mindsets' in order to embrace the philosophy of continuous, self-directed learning that underpins 70:20:10.<sup>32</sup>

Based on Carol Dweck's mindset theory, individuals with developmental mindsets are far more open to learning, seeing it as an essential aspect of their development that needs daily work.<sup>33</sup> The question for L&D is how can it help people move from a fixed mindset to a developmental mindset.

Multinational food production company Danone has addressed this challenge with its 'One Learning a Day' culture. It aims to encourage the development of:

*"A fresh mindset, so that every part of an employee's professional life,*

<sup>32</sup> Charles Jennings, 'Development Mindsets at 70:20:10' Workplace Performance blog (7 October 2014). Available at: <http://charles-jennings.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/development-mindsets-and-702010.html> (accessed 31 October 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Random House Publishing Group, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Danone - Your Development. Available at: <http://www.danone.com/en/for-you/candidates/growing-in-danone/your-development/> (accessed 31 October 2014).



This approach is about learning through action, where a person's daily work activities are regarded as opportunities for learning and growth. It has helped Danone move away from a culture where development is merely viewed as a series of events, with people attending a variety of training courses that are far removed from the reality of their day-to-day challenges and responsibilities.

### 3.1.2 Opening up the lines of communication

The 20 aspect of 70:20:10 is about how people derive knowledge and learning from others, whether that's simply talking to their colleagues about the best way to approach problems and challenges, or by utilising informal networks of contacts to help them do their jobs. If people are using informal networks within their department, team, or across the wider organisation to get information, L&D can focus on harnessing the potential of this learning channel. Rather than leaving the development of these networks to chance, L&D can nurture and streamline this process to maximise the value it adds to learning.

As an example, L&D can provide targeted assistance by setting up a 'contacts book' of internal (and external) subject matter experts on a range of areas, who are willing to share their expertise with others. It is important to make these individuals easy to access, whether this is online or face-to-face. With L&D's support, people can tap into the best possible tacit knowledge available in their organisation, rather than relying on asking their immediate colleagues (who may not be the most knowledgeable).

If a group of managers are working on new projects for the first time, for example, can they be given access to more experienced project managers? Similarly, employees stepping into people management for the first time will benefit from access to more experienced team managers, as well as their peer group outside of their own department or business function. Andrew Jacobs, an experienced L&D practitioner, recommends going one step further - asking subject matter experts to get directly involved in designing and delivering learning content.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Jacobs, '50 big ideas to change L&D', Lost and Desperate blog (14 March 2014). Available at: <http://lostanddesperate.com/2014/03/14/50-big-ideas-to-change-l-and-d/> (accessed 3 November 2014).

### 3.1.3 Developing communities of practice

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they regularly interact.<sup>36</sup> Members of a community of practice work together to develop and share knowledge of their area of interest. Examples include a group of first-time managers helping each other cope with the new demands of their role, or a group of software engineers working to solve complex coding problems. As James McLuckie, Senior Instructional Design Manager at GoodPractice, comments, in a community of practice:

*“Learning is situated within authentic activities, context and culture, and is often facilitated through the sharing of practical experience and field-based storytelling. Members of a community of practice may not explicitly frame their activities as ‘learning’, but as networking or information and knowledge sharing.”<sup>37</sup>*

L&D can play a pivotal role in helping communities of practice find their feet, get off to a good start and keep up the momentum. Although communities of practice can and do develop organically, support from L&D can make them much more efficient, prevent duplication of effort and prevent exclusive cliques from forming. L&D can also use communities of practice as a basis for capturing and managing the wealth of tacit knowledge that exists in organisations.

### 3.1.4 Provide high quality, on-demand resources

Research shows that when people need help with something in the course of their daily work, in addition to asking their colleagues or manager about it, they often turn to internet search engines.<sup>38</sup> It is likely that they will spend time and effort looking through a wide range of internet search results trying to access the information they need. From an L&D perspective, if you know that people are looking online for information, it makes sense to simplify the process as much as possible. Providing well-designed online tools is a positive step that L&D can take to ensure that people have access to credible, trustworthy online sources to fill knowledge gaps when they need to. Andrew Jacobs argues that L&D should make these resources, and indeed all learning resources, completely open and available to everybody in the organisation in order to maximise their impact.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, ‘Intro to Communities of Practice’. Available at: <http://wenger-trayner.com/theory/> (accessed 31 October 2014).

<sup>37</sup> McLuckie, J. ‘Social Media and Open Spaces for Community Formation: Implications for Learning and Practice’. Dissertation submitted for the M.Sc. in E-learning, University of Edinburgh (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Ferguson, O. and Casebow, P. ‘How Managers Learn (In Their Own Words): A Survey of Managers’ Learning Activities and Their Effectiveness.’ GoodPractice White Paper (January 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Jacobs, ‘50 big ideas to change L&D’, Lost and Desperate blog (14 March 2014). Available at: <http://lostanddesperate.com/2014/03/14/50-big-ideas-to-change-l-and-d/> (accessed 3 November 2014).

## 3.2 Five key questions for your organisation

For some organisations, the adoption and integration of 70:20:10 into the very fabric of their L&D approach is a daunting prospect. It can be difficult to know where to start and what to do. In this section, we highlight five key questions that L&D practitioners can ask of themselves and the wider organisation. These questions should help them get to grips with applying 70:20:10 in a practical way.

### 3.2.1 How is learning currently viewed in your organisation?

Before trying to introduce 70:20:10, a critical first step is to understand the dynamics of the existing learning culture in the organisation. L&D practitioners need to ask themselves whether the prevailing learning culture will facilitate or work against a new approach to learning. For the changes required by the 70:20:10 framework to be accepted and take hold, people need to take responsibility for their own learning and be empowered to direct it themselves. L&D must therefore consider whether people in the organisation have a real thirst and desire to learn, or whether they are more used to being told what to learn and when to learn it.

One particular challenge that faces L&D is how employees perceive 'learning'. In order for new approaches to become embedded in an organisation, employees must consciously recognise that informal learning has as much value as formal, course-based learning. This isn't a trivial change in mindset, since we've been conditioned to equate learning with classrooms since starting at school. However, L&D can help with this change by highlighting the power of informal learning, leveraging social proof and sharing success stories.

### 3.2.2 Will the organisation's most senior people get behind 70:20:10?

Like any other new idea or initiative, an organisation's top management must believe in and demonstrate positive support for 70:20:10 in order for it to succeed. Charles Jennings underlines the critical importance of senior leadership support to the success of 70:20:10.<sup>40</sup> He points out that senior leaders have fundamental responsibility to provide highly visible sponsorship and support for the objectives of 70:20:10, to help learning become something which goes well beyond the provision of formal courses. The L&D function's ability to convince key stakeholders of the validity and benefits of 70:20:10 is crucial of achieving this commitment.

### 3.2.3 Does L&D have the skills to promote all aspects of 70:20:10?

For many organisations, introducing 70:20:10 means that people will need to work in new ways. This realisation will push many L&D people beyond their existing spheres of expertise and out of their comfort zones. Although many L&D practitioners are forward thinking and open to change, some may encounter resistance from colleagues who remain unconvinced by 70:20:10, or view it as a threat. As Harold Jarche has pointed out, some L&D practitioners can see 70:20:10 as a threat to their role, particularly where they are heavily involved in the design and delivery of courses.<sup>41</sup>

It is likely that many L&D teams will need to review their existing skill sets, and determine how to embrace the non-formal elements of the 70:20:10 framework. Most L&D functions are highly skilled in developing and delivering traditional training, but when it comes to supporting informal and social learning, there may be a lack of experience in the team. As well as mastering these new skills, L&D practitioners may also need to broaden their horizons regarding the technologies and tools that can support 70:20:10.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Jacobs, '50 big ideas to change L&D', Lost and Desperate blog (14 March 2014). Available at: <http://lostanddesperate.com/2014/03/14/50-big-ideas-to-change-l-and-d/> (accessed 3 November 2014).

<sup>41</sup> GoodPractice interview with Harold Jarche, conducted by Stef Scott (17 October 2014).

### 3.2.4 Is 70:20:10 the right mix for your organisation?

As discussed, one of the key misconceptions around 70:20:10 is that the numbers are set in stone. However, we have seen that 70:20:10 is most useful as a tool for questioning how L&D practitioners think about learning - and not just the learning that takes place in formal settings. When starting out with 70:20:10 it is useful to look at the three areas of the framework - on-the-job experiential learning, learning from others and formal learning - and map out how L&D is currently supporting each one. Taking time to understand the function's current approach in all areas will be time well spent.

The 70:20:10 ratio is not a prescription for all L&D activity. It is a generalisation of the learning activity that is taking place in an organisation and, as such, should be used in a flexible way to inform and guide L&D practice. It is essential that practitioners take account of differences in both situation and context when it comes to designing and supporting appropriate learning experiences. For example, learners' needs differ greatly depending on their level of experience, and what they need to learn. There will be times when sending an employee on a formal course is the right development solution, but it shouldn't be the default option to the exclusion of other forms of learning. The key advantage of 70:20:10 is that it encourages L&D to explore all available options for learning and not simply to rely upon formal learning.

### 3.2.5 How can managers best support learning?

Line managers have a fundamentally important role to play in cultivating a new approach to learning in their teams. Managers are the conduit through which many learning opportunities arise and become a reality for employees. Managers assign tasks, delegate project work, allocate stretching assignments, and agree to shadowing and secondment opportunities. Managers have huge potential to influence the scope of each team member's development. In order for true change to occur, managers must consciously consider all of the options available to them to help people develop, not simply resort to sending them on courses. In this way, they will maximise the potential for informal learning and experiential, on-the-job learning opportunities to become an integral part of how every member of their team develops.

## 4. SUMMARY

When it is understood well, the 70:20:10 framework can be a catalyst for change in L&D. It acts as a trigger for L&D to review its current practice and identify whether enough attention is being focused on the non-formal learning activity taking place in organisations.

However, organisations and their L&D functions also have to be mindful of the problems that can arise when interpreting and implementing 70:20:10. Of foremost importance is the risk of taking the numbers too literally, and trying to force a rigid framework on the very people that L&D needs to help.

Through our research, we have found 70:20:10 to be an undoubtedly powerful motivator, which has shaken up long-held internal L&D assumptions about how to support learning in organisations. 70:20:10 has also given L&D considerable food for thought about its future direction and role. It calls for L&D to become a supporter, a facilitator and a driver of change, helping people to embrace learning from a more open, pervasive mindset. It also challenges current thinking about who is ultimately responsible for a person's learning experiences, and how those experiences should be organised and supported.

These are exciting times to be involved in L&D, as the opportunity to empower people to take control of their learning has never been greater.

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## 6. APPENDICES

### 6.1 Overview of the research methodology

Following a period of desk research and a review of the available literature on 70:20:10, a shortlist of possible interview subjects for the project were identified in October 2014. Potential interview subjects were targeted and research interviews were conducted with five L&D experts during October 2014. Questions were formulated in advance, and all interviews were recorded via Skype. Major themes, important areas and key quotes were identified from the interview transcripts for inclusion in the report. The report was developed during October and November 2014.

### 6.2 About GoodPractice

GoodPractice has earned a fantastic reputation for delivering high quality content, designed to improve the performance of leaders and managers.

Via toolkits, e-learning and assessment tools, over one million people across more than 200 organisations are using GoodPractice's blended learning solutions to make the most of their skills and talents.

Improving the performance of your leaders and managers is essential for both stability and growth. We are here to help you improve and are happy to discuss the specific needs of your organisation.

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