



Digital Learning 2.0

Into the future of learning in 6 steps

Embracing a digitally-led future of learning requires L&D teams to look beyond current challenges and engage with the bigger picture - Digital Learning 2.0. So says Lynsey Whitmarsh, Director of Digital and Innovation.



Digital Learning 2.0

Organizations are investing in blended and digital learning, which is a really good thing. What isn't so good, however, is how that investment is happening. What we're seeing at Hemsley Fraser is that some organizations are almost working through a digital learning shopping checklist, rather than thinking holistically about what is required, how it'll be deployed or even why it's important. Much of the focus is seemingly on short term fixes. This needs to change. It is really important that organizations understand and evaluate the future potential of digital solutions and the impact on learners before they purchase or implement anything new.

Problems arise when organizations rush into purchases without performing due diligence or properly understanding what the impact might be. This happens when organizations are stuck in the 'here' and 'now', crossing off things on their generic checklist. We need a platform: check, got that. We need to buy content: check, got that. We have staff working on our LMS who can upload stuff: check, got that...and so on. This is just short-term thinking. Instead of taking this approach, there needs to be a focus on the really important stuff, such as the experience of the learner, how learning can drive engagement and the real value that great learning offers to both learners and the business, now and in the future. They need to be thinking Digital Learning 2.0. Learning should be something that's part of your job, something that flows with - rather than interrupting - work.

Into the future of learning in 6 steps

Step1: Be aware of the technology lifecycle

This means taking a step back and thinking beyond the next procurement cycle. Work to a five year plan and keep in mind the current and future needs of the whole business.

A future-proofed, flexible tech solution is crucial when considering long-term value. While it's important to think about the look and feel of a digital product, it's more important to choose a flexible solution that can keep pace with the ever-changing rhythms of business and learner needs.

Step2: Understand the total cost of ownership

This part of the decision-making process is often overlooked. Organizations need to balance the cost of buying, maintaining and updating a solution against the value that solution will bring. Calculating that value is very hard when organizations aren't sure what it is they want to measure their value against. A good starting place is to understand how much it costs to provide digital learning to each staff member and then how effective that learning is at achieving the desired improvements. Hemsley Fraser focuses on what it calls 'digital engagement' which is a measure of how staff are interacting in a meaningful way with the content. You'd be surprised at how low the digital engagement score is across the industry as a whole - it's usually less than 10%, which means that less than 10% of the people with access to digital learning are accessing it, with potentially even fewer benefiting from it. With the right platform and communication strategy this engagement score can increase significantly to 50-90%. For an organization of 10,000 learners, that means a lot of extra people benefiting from a learning solution. And if both solutions cost the same, the one with up to 50% engagement is giving at least 40% better value!

Step 3: Create a five year vision for learning

Organizations need to create a strong, clear vision of what great learning looks like over the next one to five years. Know what will drive real value to learners and the organization. Communicate with people all around the business and get their perspective on what great learning could and should look like. Think about what they see and use as consumers in their leisure time. They're used to personalized, intuitive, user-friendly content and functionality - YouTube, Netflix, Spotify etc - and they're going to want that in the workplace too. The painfully low engagement scores quoted above are symptomatic of ignoring this crucial element.

Furthermore, deploying a solution and expecting employees to flock to it is probably the most damaging mistake an organization can make when launching new platforms - it simply never works. There has to be a focused, well planned and comprehensive communication and launch strategy, followed by a steady drip-feed of updates and notifications to keep people engaged.



Into the future of learning in 6 steps (cont.)

Step 4: Use data to make better decisions

Take what tech has to offer, which means collecting and using data to identify what the learning challenges are, where engagement is strong and where it's weak. Data is a fantastic resource that L&D must use more. Analytics can show us how well a piece of learning or a piece of communication landed, for example. Here at Hemsley Fraser, if the Board sends out a message on our engagement hub, we can see how many people have watched it and engaged with it. That's really useful information because it means we can carry out additional actions if we need to follow up and engage with our employees, based on that information.

Technology can help us make smarter decisions. It can also help us communicate those decisions more effectively. Meaningful data is a great communication tool and can really help L&D get the business on board with its vision.

Step 5: Develop your communication skills

Communication is key to implementing a successful digital learning strategy and the communication needs to be two-way. You listen to what learners and the business say and you explain how learning can meet their needs, setting the context for the learning and using the data you have. As a modern day L&D professional, you have to be an excellent communicator – an influencer and a facilitator. You have to use all the communication channels at your disposal to drive support for and excitement around the solutions you are implementing. The more buzz there is, the more people will use it. Tell people why they should use this new platform and sell it to them. Be clear on what they will gain from using the platform. If they will gain more insight into what the organization is trying to achieve, tell them that. If it's the skills and behaviors needed to achieve those goals, tell them that too.

Step 6: Call out the technology fads

Senior leaders may be unwilling to make the investment just yet and you might have to break your journey down into phases. If your organization isn't ready to commit to your transformation vision, then make sure that any steps you take, any purchases you make, support where you want to end up. Don't be seduced by shiny new toys and fads that will only be a short term fix. Make sure your phased investments help get you to your destination.

Recently, Hemsley Fraser commissioned a study regarding the impact digital is having in learning, surveying a variety of experts in the field to get their thoughts on how digital will 'disrupt' learning, and advancements that would be needed in learning over the next 2-3

years to adapt. . . . Their top answers? 'Better blended experiences', 'self-led micro-learning' and a 'better digital user experience'. Thankfully, all options that we offer as standard to our clients today!

Gamification is a good example of where L&D can get it right or wrong. Lots of organizations love gamification and it can be brilliant, but you have to use it properly to get results. What is the value to an organization if 200 people have a gold badge, for instance? Will it make a difference to the bottom line? There has to be a balance between trying to get people engaged and understanding what the drivers for engagement are in your organization and how that engagement turns into value.

It comes back to knowing why you are doing something and how the learning will drive learner engagement and performance and thereby, business performance. Ensuring all your procurement decisions are aligned to the longer term plan, rather than the one budget cycle, means you hopefully won't end up down a blind alley or spending twice as much for something than you intended.

When procurement is tied in to the overall vision, that's when you get real results. Technology should be scalable. You need to make sure everything is future-proofed and will help you deliver on your vision over the next five years. And when the business starts to see the difference the learning is making, then it becomes easier to win them over to your way of thinking.

The exec team often wants to fit digital into the same mould that the organization has occupied for many years. However, expectations of learners have changed and markets are moving very rapidly now. Learning needs to be in the flow of work and help engage teams behind driving to achieve the organizational goals. We are now in the era of Digital Learning 2.0.

Digital solutions should drive pace and efficiencies in a business.

It is the same for L&D, Learning has to be different now as learning is more holistic and isn't just about learning soft or technical skills, it needs to be broader to include communication of key information and a sense of the organization is and its culture.

Technology enables us to learn differently and do some really clever things.

Sometimes the business needs nudging in the right direction – you need to get them thinking differently by showing them the real future of learning.

If you're interested in how we're helping our clients to achieve Digital Learning 2.0, please contact us:

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