

ONLINE, ON-DEMAND, BUT NOT ON THEIR OWN.

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THE LANDSCAPE CURRENTLY FACING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS IS UNPRECEDENTED IN TERMS OF THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IT PRESENTS. TODAY'S 24/7 GLOBAL WORKFORCE JUGGLES ESCALATING DEMANDS, DWINDLING RESOURCES AND INCREASINGLY FRAGMENTED WORKDAYS FILLED WITH COUNTLESS PRIORITIES, ACTIVITIES AND INTERRUPTIONS. THIS LEAVES JUST **1 PERCENT** OF AN EMPLOYEE'S TIME FOR DEVELOPMENT, ACCORDING TO BERSIN BY DELOITTE. THIS SHRINKING WINDOW OF TIME FOR LEARNING SEEMS TO PARALLEL THE SHRINKING BUDGETS AVAILABLE FOR IT IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS.

But it's not just the business context that's putting extreme pressure on learning. It's also the evolutionary dance that we're engaged in with technology: the destructive cycle where high expectations for immediacy cultivates impatience, which fuels greater immediacy expectations. To meet the need for speed, people are importing practices from their outside lives; for example, relying on technology via search engines and watching short YouTube videos to get their jobs done.

MEET AND TEACH THEM WHERE THEY ARE

In response, L&D departments and training providers are evolving their delivery models from "push" to "pull" methods. They are transitioning large volumes of traditional classroom-based content to flexible, technology-enabled enterprise-wide platforms. These on-demand systems offer anywhere, anytime and any way access to self-tailoring learning experiences designed to meet individual needs.

Heather Hoerdemann, vice president of talent at Synopsys, recently reconceived leadership learning in her organization and is supporting it with an online platform. She says, "We no longer have the capacity to rely upon traditional models of development. And it never really made sense to develop

everyone in the same way. So, we developed something scalable and sensitive to the time-crunched reality facing our leaders.”

The problem is that for many organizations, on-demand learning frequently leaves employees and leaders on their own without the support required to ensure that their time and the organization’s investment pays off.

For many organizations, the reality of this new learning isn’t living up to the hype. It’s not uncommon to hear “We built it but they didn’t come,” “The information isn’t translating to behavior change,” or, “The community-building and peer-to-peer interaction promise isn’t materializing.”

Applying old thinking to a new model simply isn’t delivering the intended results for many. A new mindset and three high-impact practices are required: curate content, create context and cultivate connection.

CURATE CONTENT AND CONTEXT: THE EVOLUTION OF L&D

While content is king, context is the power behind the throne; and together,

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they’re at the core of effective, on-demand learning. As a result, today’s L&D professionals must focus on the “what,” and develop new competencies in sourcing, configuring, delivering and refreshing content. They must also focus on the “why,” helping learners connect the dots in a compelling way.

According to Tulie White, executive director of global sales capability, insights and development at The Estée Lauder Companies, “It all starts with the learners – understanding precisely what they need – even if they don’t know to ask for it.” This level of familiarity with users enables learning to connect with real problems and challenges, creating a context for engagement.

Rob Cahill, CEO of Jhana (a provider of bite-size, on-demand leadership development), encourages thinking “in terms of the job to be done. You create much more impactful, relevant learning if you focus on a single learner role – such as first-level managers – and design the content and experience for that specific role.”

Selecting high-quality content sources is key. While there are infinite sources of free content on the Internet, most organizations undertaking an on-demand initiative prefer the stability and predictability of reputable content providers. Whether free or fee-based, the content must be carefully vetted,

ensuring “authenticity, relevance, and cultural fit,” according to White.

Then comes the important work of chunking (both for stand-alone and pathway-based options), organizing and deciding upon the most appropriate and actionable resources.

CULTIVATE THE MANAGER-LEARNER CONNECTION

Learning is social, and understanding is enriched by sharing what is learned. The retention and application of new knowledge expands through interactions with others. On-demand learning systems that generate the best results are ones that integrate the human connection. For many learners, the connection that matters most is the one they have with their managers, making active manager support a key success factor in the on-demand environment.

Hoerdemann suggests, “People won’t opt in to this way of learning by osmosis. Learners need to be guided toward the resource. It’s important for managers to introduce it and position the benefits and importance to our company’s learning culture.”

Best-in-class companies are designated using three metrics: employee engagement, revenue per FTE and customer satisfaction rates. Studies conducted by the Aberdeen Group, a global research firm, reveal that best-

WHEN CURATION BECOMES CREATION

Despite the exponential growth of online information, not everything can be curated. Heather Hoerdemann of Synopsys cautions, “Don’t discount the uniqueness of your organization or industry. You can’t expect to get everything off-the-shelf.” Content development must supplement most content curation efforts.

Determine what’s distinctive about how your organization conducts business. Identify critical messages to be delivered by your leaders, and select the models and stories that reflect your culture. Then package them as additional learning elements to complement curated material.

And don’t forget about reflection and application planning. While some of what’s learned on-demand can be put to immediate use, other content gets set aside, or used in conjunction with other skills. As a result, it’s essential to build in opportunities for learners to reflect, capture insights, make connections and instigate knowledge transfer through intention setting and action planning.



in-class companies are 73 percent more likely than others to ensure that after learning has occurred, employees have one-on-one meetings with their managers to discuss how to apply the learning to their roles.

Paradoxically, online platforms increase the likelihood that managers will relegate this responsibility to “the system,” and offer less support when more is needed.

ACTIVATE AUTHENTIC MANAGER ENGAGEMENT

What needs to happen to ensure the manager engagement that’s required to support results in this on-demand world? Janice Hall, senior VP of global sales capability center of excellence lead at The Estée Lauder Companies, explains, “Help the day-to-day manager

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Today’s learners connect with others and exchange knowledge through an ever-growing number of channels. What can be done to jumpstart those connections and align them with the business’ needs? The Estée Lauder Companies is introducing community manager to the L&D function. The community manager is a resource dedicated to engaging with and fostering connections among learners. White explains that this role “serves as an invisible hand, guiding and keeping people connected to their learning journey.”

be excited. Create products they can’t help but love. Invite them to participate in the development process. Involve managers in pilots and take their feedback seriously. If they feel a part of it, they’ll naturally want to engage with employee learning.”

Even when involved, managers are often unclear about the part they can play in driving employee-owned, on-demand learning results. Making their role concrete and actionable boils down to helping them adopt three key practices:

• Facilitate insights

Insights are those aha! moments when everything clicks and becomes clear. Insights drive behavior change. Managers can spark insights by asking, “What sticks with you most about the topic?” Or, “How does that fit with your role?”

• Generate action

Managers can prompt focused application of what’s learned. Simply asking, “Now what?” and, “Where and when can you use what you are learning?” can create momentum.

• Set an example

One of the most powerful ways a manager can support on-demand learning is by modelling the expected behavior. Being vulnerable and openly sharing personal learnings, challenges and missteps promotes real change.

Clarity helps, but managers also need to see their support role as doable in the context of the demands they juggle. Hall advises, “It’s our job to help managers navigate the system; but more importantly, it’s about making it easy

for managers to follow up and coach to the learning.”

To keep it simple, The Estée Lauder Companies provides managers with streamlined micro-moment leader guides aligned with the learning. A one-page month at-a-glance schedule flags brief, high-impact interactions that can easily be integrated into ongoing conversations.

Synopsys embeds concise summaries of on-demand content throughout its HR systems. Easy access to this content helps managers co-create growth goals with employees, match learning activities to individual development needs, and offer regular coaching.

Practical tools like these make manager engagement with on-demand learning less daunting and more doable:

- Quick-hit videos or apps that demonstrate just-in-time coaching.
- On-the-job cues checklists to initiate learning conversations.
- Question menus that help facilitate insights and action.
- Listings of on-the-job development experiences.

WHAT NEXT?

People must learn more and faster than ever before. On-demand learning has the potential to enable this mission-critical priority. But, what’s necessary to ensure that this approach delivers on its promise? Curate high-quality content tailored to learners and business challenges. Create context for learners with consistent messages about why learning matters and how it can be used. Cultivate connections between managers and employees and learners with learners. These three C’s guide the way to making the most of what on-demand learning has to offer. 🔄

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