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The Impact of Technology and Social Media on Learning

"Our inherent drive to learn together can be facilitated through emerging technologies that extend, widen and deepen our reach … enabling a new kind of knowledge-building ecosystem with people at its core."

Tony Bingham and Marcia Connor.

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Executive Summary

Context – the 'media revolution'

1 Two communication technology developments are catalysts for societal change and influencing the way people learn and develop.

- Mobile devices are changing how people conduct their lives.

- Social networks are increasingly affecting how business is done – as well as how organisations behave and are managed.

2 These developments are affecting organisations in respect of

- accelerating organisations' 'clock speed', for example in decision-making, problem-solving, business improvement and innovation

- cost management

- structures, by breaking down silos and enabling collaboration

- forcing more openness and transparency into culture.

3 Those managers resistant to more open communications tend to use information security risks as an excuse. However, emerging technologies provide new protections to accompany the people processes that should provide the first line of defence in risk management.

4 Organisations have been quicker at focusing on commercial and PR aspects of the media revolution than focusing on internal work processes, learning, knowledge management, communication and culture. However, most large employers are now taking new media seriously.

Learning and work

5 How is the media revolution affecting the way people learn?

- Behaviours are changing as people adapt to the new technologies.

- 'Digital natives' are a growing proportion of the workforce – they rely less on 'knowing' and more on 'knowing where' to obtain rapid answers – and can provide competitive advantage in shaping digital workplaces.

- Generation Y and Z employees are more inclined to share and learn from peers, and feel frustrated by bureaucracy, IT inefficiencies and a lack of transparency.

- Being able to use social media is not about age, but more about attitude and familiarity in fully using devices and software.

6 All interviewees are working towards more informal learning, using the 70/20/10 model. While some have done so for years, for others it is a recent development, often driven by economic pressures.

7 Other priority areas for improving learning include

- making e-learning more interactive and engaging, especially compliance training

- improving just-in-time work support content, particularly for mobile devices

- adapting soft skills development to a digital workplace

- closing the traditional gap between knowledge management and L&D.

"Simplicity and problem-solving capabilities are the key desirables for the DNA of corporate systems. Better technology helps, but it's how you use it that counts." **Clifford Burroughs, CIO, United Biscuits.**

Social media and the digital workplace

8   Social media are re-shaping both L&D and knowledge management by promoting peer-to-peer and collective learning, with cultural implications through demanding greater transparency, trust and democracy within organisations.

9   Where processes and software for learning, internal communication and project management become integrated, this enhances collaboration, business improvement, innovation and change management. To achieve this, the HR/L&D, IT and communications functions must themselves collaborate.

10 Companies aiming to become more 'social' need to develop employees' digital competence, use internal evangelists to propagate good practices, and build an engaging leadership cadre to lead learning and collaboration in a digital workplace.

Leadership, HR and L&D

11 Factors holding back organisations from adapting to new communication technologies include

- a poor appreciation of their potential among leaders and managers

- IT functions struggling with legacy systems – as well as or, alternatively, focusing more on the features/costs of technologies than on how people can learn and work effectively

- HR function shortcomings in appreciating the potential of technology or the OD implications

- weak L&D leadership, lacking influence, not devising persuasive business cases, and retaining a traditional training perspective.

12 Traditional RoI measurement is not helpful in identifying benefits, though some organisations are beginning to build a body of convincing evidence of how capability and performance is enhanced.

13 L&D functions should be led by business transformation experts – supported by expertise in sourcing learning solutions internally and externally, learning technology, and the skill/influence to help management to become 'learning leaders'.

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