

An aerial, top-down view of a large, diverse crowd of people at a colorful event. The ground is covered in vibrant, multi-colored patterns in shades of blue, purple, pink, and green. People are seen from above, wearing various colorful clothing and some with race bibs. The overall atmosphere is bright and energetic.

crf

CORPORATE RESEARCH FORUM

THE FUTURE OF **LEARNING**

Sponsored by:

coursera

ORACLE

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Technological innovation, increasing complexity, uncertainty and competitiveness in the business landscape, demographic shifts, and climate change are powerful forces that have been reshaping organisations, their workforces, and what is required of them for some time now – and these forces have shortened the lifespan of knowledge, placing a premium on upskilling and reskilling. **Learning is a key strategic lever that organisations can pull to maintain performance in this complex landscape.**
- ▶ **The pandemic has accelerated the opportunity to rethink how people learn, and to expand the scope of corporate learning.** Organisations are broadening and improving learning modalities, experimenting with learning solutions, improving the link between learning and business strategy, and building learning cultures. But there are challenges to rethinking learning. There is still too much focus on one-off, formal learning interventions, learning strategy is sometimes only tenuously linked to business strategy, budgets and headcounts are declining, time for learning is scarce, and people are burned out.
- ▶ **Too many organisations are starting with learning solutions rather than clearly defining the business problem and learning objectives.** Learning functions would benefit from being deliberate in the design of learning – start with the learning objectives, and then consider the best blend of learning modalities. How can you deliver the right content in the right way, at the right time (and in an efficient and cost-effective way)? Organisations should also be cautious about the potential of creating a two-tier learning track, where senior and high potential employees receive more thoughtful and higher-quality learning than other members of the workforce.

▶ **The future of learning is strategic.** Strategic learning has two aspects. First, align learning strategy to business strategy, in order to identify and enable the capabilities the business needs for future performance. For many organisations, better strategic alignment is likely to translate to a need for significant upskilling and reskilling. Second, use the learning process to help drive innovation and business problem-solving. Organisations need a mix of productive learning (which optimises today) and generative learning (which helps the organisation build for tomorrow).

- *Strategic governance is an area for improvement.* We find that few organisations are using a governance structure, such as a learning board or council, to regularly connect L&D and business leaders. Improved strategic governance would enable leaders to define, review, design, and fund the learning strategy as the business strategy evolves.
- *Learning leaders need to build strategic relationships throughout the organisation.* For example, Learning professionals will need to work much more closely in partnership with talent acquisition in future, so there's better linkage between what's being learned and opportunities to put learning into practice on the job.

▶ **The future of learning is collaborative and continuous.** By collaborative, we mean that it will be social – people will solve problems, complete tasks, and learn new concepts with and from each other. By continuous, we mean that individuals, teams, and organisations will be 'always learning' – storing, reflecting on, applying, and refining what they have learned. A learning orientation, technology, and line managers are key mechanisms organisations can leverage to support connected, constant learning.

▶ **There is a great deal of consolidation in the learning technology market at present.** A key development we see is the use of social technologies to foster collaborative learning. Employees are creating their own learning spaces, using social technologies such as Teams, Slack, and Miro to create and exchange knowledge. Organisations should lean into the energy around how people collaborate and get work done, rather than trying to monitor and control learning activity in dedicated spaces that few people may use.

▶ **Many organisations are grappling with how to create a culture of learning.** We identify learning habits as a key behavioural mechanism through which individuals, teams, and organisations can build a learning orientation that primes them to be alert to learning opportunities, ready to apply / practice learning, and prepared to try again. Organisations are reporting success with learning habits centred on being curious and making time for reflection.

▶ **Line managers play a key role in setting the tone for learning, enabling access to learning, and helping their teams and individual reports activate learning.** Organisations therefore need to select, develop, and support managers to play this role. Actions organisations can take include teaching line managers how adults learn, rewarding and promoting managers who are skilled in helping their people grow and develop, and reviewing the communications strategy to ensure it's sufficiently focused on giving managers information about what learning is available and how they can support their team's learning.

▶ **The future of learning is evidence-based, but few organisations are using data consistently to inform the different aspects of learning.** Gut feelings are still driving the assessment of learning needs at many organisations, and evaluation of learning, when it happens at all, is usually focused on the immediate evaluation of learner satisfaction. Lack of time, skills, and resources are some of the barriers to taking a more evidence-based approach to learning. Evaluation should start before learning is designed or delivered – at the stage of assessing learning needs. Organisations would benefit from defining a process for assessing learning needs, and clarifying how that feeds into the process for evaluation.

▶ **The Learning function must evolve, or risk extinction.** Businesses need their workforces to learn at speed and scale. This should mean an elevated L&D function, integrated with business strategy and core talent processes. But few learning professionals and functions are currently equipped to play this role. There is still too much focus on learning programmes and how to deliver them, admin and facilitation, and controlling rather than enabling learning. Performance consulting, design, marketing and communication, data literacy, and product management are key future capabilities for the learning function.