



A Compelling Future for Learning

An interview with
Peter Cheese
and Gill White
of the CIPD



www.brightwave.co.uk

Following Brightwave's successful first appearance at April's CIPD Learning and Development (L&D) show, Charles Gould met the Institute's CEO Peter Cheese and Capability and Career Development Director Gill White to discuss the past, present and future of L&D, the impact of technology on the learning space, and the sector's confidence problem...

Charles: You've mentioned the importance of looking at Learning and Development (L&D), not just from the perspective of the profession itself, but from the perspective of how it helps businesses. How do you think technology is affecting the way L&D can be relevant and valuable to business leaders going forward?

Peter: It is very interesting. There was a first wave of e-learning that went up and fell down again because you could learn perfectly well from a book, or go and listen to something, rather than have to put it into a technological frame. I think it has taken - and we are still not there - a lot longer than one might have imagined for the profession at large to embrace the benefits that technology can bring. The benefits are manifest, and it is not that technology will replace all forms of traditional learning but my goodness; we need to move the dial a bit quicker!

We have always known that the best learning doesn't come from a chalk and talk, didactic approach, and yet that is still a very predominant model. At the same time, technology when used in the right way can arguably support better learning in terms of retention of learning and is also

highly scalable. These are big shifts and for an industry that I think sometimes lacks confidence or is guilty of being too inward looking and protective, but then becomes concerned about outside pressures.

Charles: That's understandable though, with disruption...

Peter: Yes - with any disruption, you either try to embrace it or you try to resist it. I think broadly across HR and L&D there has been a bit too much resistance to embracing change, and I think that speaks to the confidence of the profession. There is endless debate about what value we are contributing.

This is about business, it has always been about business, and what frustrates business people is that you have a professional function that is too isolated and can't 'speak the language of business', and the language of business has to be "Where does value creation come from? How do I drive that?"

But it takes two to tango. Business itself has been pretty inarticulate, and you therefore get that mix of a profession that probably has been a bit too resistant, and a business

community that has not been brought up with it. Most business leaders have pretty much zero background in people management, which is why there is a more profound shift in the agenda to have these debates in the boardroom on everything from 'What is corporate culture?' to 'What are my really strategic workforce options? How do I understand all this stuff?'

That is now the debate. It is an opportunity to summarise it, which we in L&D need to take.

Charles: I think you are right in terms of L&D, and business leaders are not necessarily going to drive this forward because business leaders have succeeded in getting to where they have got to through formal education, so their instinct is to think, 'That is what everyone else should be doing. L&D create some courses for me please.'

But the people who are coming into the workforce now are learning all the time from the smartphone in their pockets, getting instant access to free content whenever they want and they expect that. There is learning to be embedded, as you say, into the workforce. But I am concerned that as you get higher up an organisation that isn't recognised or understood properly.

Gill: I think it is less about the leaders saying "provide me with a course" and more about the L&D person actually not articulating what the options are. So they are building courses because they have always built courses, rather than saying, "Actually there are different ways we could do this here" and influencing the leader, rather than expecting the leader to be the expert in L&D! It is incumbent upon L&D to say there are new ways of working here, there are new expectations from our employees, and we need to enable that.

We were talking last night about it. It is twenty three years since [Peter] Senge came out with *The Fifth Discipline* and we all inherently know that a culture of people owning their own learning is the right thing to do, so if L&D people are not embracing or enabling that, they are actually a blocker, and that starts to become a real issue.

Charles: Do you think that is where we are at the moment?

Peter: Well I think one significant force for change is absolutely the younger generation, coming into work and saying "You want me to do what?" and that is not just about learning, it is about all sorts of ways in which we engage and work.

To give you another analogy, I have long believed that corporate social responsibility has profoundly been driven, certainly massively accelerated, by a generation coming into work and saying, "What are you doing? Why are we doing this stuff?" So, I think it is an acknowledgement that yes, if we are honest about L&D, I put it down to things like confidence, and comfort with the known versus the challenges of the unknown, and the early steps around e-learning were just repetitions of what we were doing before, and not a really substantive change.

But business leaders are now beginning to have much more of a debate about what the skills we really need are, and how we better build them. I'm seeing these young people saying, "Well what you are doing today doesn't make any sense." This is a fantastic opportunity, we have got to step up to embrace it with confidence. L&D have to start saying, "This is what we should be doing", and not waiting with an order book assuming that somebody else has decided what we should be doing.

Charles: Do you see L&D as being more facilitators than deliverers of learning?

Gill: Absolutely. The new content we are writing is all about curation, enabling social and personal learning, all about that area.

Peter: There is a spectrum of things, there will always be and we will continue blended learning in all its forms. There are some competencies that organisations just need everyone to understand, a particular core skill like project management or finance 101 or ethical requirements - the organisation just needs everyone to understand it, so creates courses that everybody has got to use. But the reality is that we are going to see more and more of this shift towards the notion of workforces made up of individuals, who often want to take more accountability and responsibility for what they learn.

We are going to move away from very monolithic models. We have had L&D practices that recognise that shifting dynamic and embrace it. I think we will absolutely create a compelling future which is more clearly aligned to what businesses really need, making a bigger impact and delivering greater value.

And if we don't, then somebody else will do it for us.

Charles: The new generation of learners who expect something more than just to come in and do a job - are we in danger of pandering to them, especially if the employment market picks up becomes a seller's market for employees?

Gill: I take your point, but I think it is less about pandering to those people than removing the blocks that stop them from

learning. We shouldn't be employing people who are expecting us to develop them. We should be employing people who are used to managing their own development, where our role is to just provide that opportunity for them. Again, in Google they have a particular digital marketing course that you can learn online. The tutor is forbidden from answering questions to encourage that the answers are out there, so go and find it.

Charles: I think sometimes that is where training is taking the place of good management, and as a manager in my own organisation, what is needed is to help people understand what is expected of them and giving them the tools to learn, solve their own problems and develop their own skills.

Peter: Those are all principles of good people management, things like engagement, autonomy, giving people more space, and aligning to the bigger ideas around organisational purpose, and knowing what the whole business is about.

I think this kind of interesting dynamic between management or the business and the employee is exactly the point where HR and L&D sit. They need to be able to understand what the needs of the workforce are; and what kind of workforce have I got; and how am I going to build that workforce for the future in order to match the needs of the business.

They sometimes sense the power's come back to them, so they can go back to some of the poor practices of the past, but we should be confident enough now to stand up and say, "Look, if you needed evidence that this does not work, this kind of command and control, shout and tell stuff - we have had all of that evidence for a long time."

We are at this kind of reflection point: I genuinely believe there is now enough dialogue for most people to see that some of the poor practices and role models and leadership structures we have had in the past, have to change. Not because this is being nice to employees, if that was the concern. This is about how you ensure you are creating an effective and sustainable business environment and getting the most of your people - why would that be a bad business principle?

Charles: Conventional e-learning has often been targeted at more routine work as opposed to knowledge work. Obviously deindustrialisation has created all sorts of different jobs in developed economies, but there are still a lot of routine jobs - I'm thinking of big retailers and so on. But then you have got a completely different kind of place where we spend 38% of our time searching for information to help us do our jobs. We frequently have to solve problems and make judgments using ambiguous information, and the technology that's evolved over the last few years is perfectly suited to helping us do that - because that is how we use information outside of work. We don't see it as something separate. How do you think that might affect particular sectors which are much more knowledge-focused?

Peter: Yes, as you say from an economic standpoint there has been a massive shift in the last 15 - 20 years towards more service- and knowledge-based economies, and that is why intangibles as a proportion of market value have grown so significantly. A different topic we are interested in shedding more light on is 'So what kind of jobs are we talking about here?'

There are still plenty of jobs where a more routine, traditional form of learning delivery

may be acceptable. But for the knowledge-sector jobs, it is more complex. It has taken time - which is not surprising - to really figure out how to create the right sort of learning interventions on everything to soft skills to knowledge worker skills. To go back to the Google-type context, really what they are saying is what we need to enable through learning in the knowledge worker environment, is the best possible access to learning, the best possible access to information, so we reduce that 38% and recognise that that is what knowledge workers do, and trying to teach them in a more didactic or formal traditional way isn't really the way to do it.

It's true to say, going back to the somewhat conservative nature of the profession, we were rather stuck with our morals for a very long time and focused an awful lot on the process and then just trying to make that process more efficient, rather than going back to the fundamentals of how people really learn. If we have to build more soft skills and drive behavioural change, this needs much more subtle learning interventions than just sitting people down in classrooms.

Charles: It is a bit scary when you have to go back to those sorts of basics and say, 'How do people really learn?' because it challenges everything.

Gill: What fascinates me about the research in that debate that a big chunk of knowledge economy learning is actually social learning, peer-to-peer, learning from each other. But actually if you reverse your argument and take it back to a more routine role, if I am on an apprenticeship, who is teaching me? My colleagues. Jim teaches Bob on the production line, the same way he always does and likewise, I seek an ambassador here who is an expert on whatever and they teach me...

Charles: That's why I think the 70:20:10 model appeals instinctively to people: we all know that actually we may have done a certain amount of formal learning, but really, we learn on the job, we learn from people. How much do you buy into the idea that only 10% of what we learn is formal?

Peter: I think it's probably about right. Anybody's individual and personal experience will probably reflect that. I think as general knowledge it probably is true. You would have to look at different highly technical skills like teaching computer programming, then the 10% is going to be a lot higher, but for some very challenging skills - soft skills or knowledge worker skills - I think possibly 10% is even too much. So there is a spectrum.

To use that analogy, if we broadly accept the 70:20:10 model, then we have certainly put an awful lot of time and effort into the 10% and too little onto the 70%. That's the wider point, and then with technology you now have a means to enable or recognise more of that 70%, so you are bringing the learning experience closer to the point of work. Neuroscience tells us that you learn because you keep rehearsing and practising, and the best place to do that is in the work environment. It isn't only going to be technology that drives us.

Charles: One last question for you, is whether perhaps you are seeing more enlightened organisations blazing a trail for some of these things, and where they might be.

Peter: Yes and I think I tend to take a sort of sectoral view of it and to be honest, think yes, you can absolutely see some much more innovative and strategic practice in tech firms, for obvious reasons: they tend to have a younger workforce. They are competing for talent, and some of the fiercest talents wars - they never went away - are in that sector. So you have to be damn good at managing and retaining and growing people. And they are going to be tech savvy, so there is a whole bunch of reasons why you would look at the Googles all the way through to the firms like yours which by and large are much further down the pipe on this stuff.

But we also see good practice in other sectors. I pick out things like some of the retail and consumer products because again they have got staff turnover, they have to retrain people, they are very global, a very competitive market. They have got market dynamics which are forcing them to do a lot of stuff differently.

Interestingly, some of the exciting stuff I see going in the consumer product and retail space is analytics, which is so important, and the reason they are good at analytics is because that is a very core part of what they do, all their fantastic marketing analytics expertise, which is based on their consumer base, can be turned to their employee base. And then you start to reflect what differential practices are in HR and L&D and what comes through is this: **really understanding your workforce.**

Biographies



Peter Cheese joined the CIPD as Chief Executive in July 2012. He spent 30 years working at Accenture, culminating in a 7 year spell as Global Managing Director leading the firm's Talent and Organisation Performance Consulting Practice. He also held various executive sponsorship positions for Accenture's firm-wide skills and capability development programs, and the firm's global Human Capital and Talent Strategy.

Peter is a European Board Director with Junior Achievement Young Enterprise Europe, an organisation focused on the development of entrepreneurial, financial and employability skills in young people through business engagement in schools and universities. He was voted by HR Magazine as the most influential thinker in HR in the UK for 2013.



Gill White joined CIPD in July 2012 as Head of CIPD Training, and was appointed in May 2013 to head up the newly formed Directorate of Capability and Career Development. Gill drives the design and delivery of development solutions that support the profession from start of career to end, including career advice and management, training solutions, Conferences, Exhibitions and Events and a CPD offer. Prior to working for the CIPD Gill has held a variety of Head of L&D roles at Vodafone, Xchanging and SSP and Operational roles, such as MD of the consultancy IDology, and Operations Manager for Whitbread, Greenalls and Vodafone.

Gill holds the prestigious Chartered Director status, one of only 1000 in the UK, awarded by the Institute of Directors.



Charles Gould is the founder and CEO of next generation learning experts Brightwave. Charles has 13 years' experience of designing and producing e-learning solutions for corporate clients at PricewaterhouseCoopers, Epic and BT. At the end of 2000 Charles left PwC, where he was a Senior Manager and Principal Consultant, to set up Brightwave.