LEADING LIGHTS

Leading-edge thinking from the brightest minds in learning.
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We’ve scoured the web to bring you the latest must-read blogs and articles from the most inspired thinkers in the learning community.

Curated into this handy e-magazine - these 5 short articles reveal a fascinating insight into the thoughts, aspirations and ideas of the learning world’s most astute commentators.

In this issue:

Recent winner of the Colin Corder award for services to learning at the 2017 Learning Awards, **Nick Shackleton-Jones** reveals what he believes is the anatomy of the modern learning professional.

**Lisa Minogue-White** of Willow DNA, predicts how virtual reality might open up a global market for skills and capability.

Founder and CEO of Happy, **Henry Stewart**, explains what being happy at work really means (Hint: it’s not free cakes and ball-pools).

**Laura Overton** reveals 7 mindset shifts that will help L&D professionals break through in 2017.

And finally, **David James**, provides guidance on how we can influence the way new managers learn how to do their job before they start managing people.
An Anatomy of the Modern Learning Professional

It’s that time of year again: the month where people start producing technology / trend predictions for the world of learning in 2017.

I’ve become sceptical about these lists. In the last couple of decades there’s been no shortage of new technology, but the learning industry itself seems to have changed very little. We have become adept at using shiny new tech to do the same old things (such as trying to force-feed people stuff that doesn’t help them in any obvious way). What has happened is a dramatic widening of the gap between the way we learn & get things done in everyday life, and the way we learn & get stuff done in organisations. In real life if I want to know something I Google it, and if I want to know how to do something I YouTube it. In organisations I still need to ask the person standing next to me what to do, all the while subjected to a barrage of pointless ‘educational’ content, dumped from a great height, using the latest technology. When people say they ‘haven’t got time’ to do their learning, that’s telling you something.

Education and learning are so now utterly divorced that it is sometimes hard to imagine a reconciliation. Higher education is still struggling to use the technology of the 1990s to do what they did in the 1890s.

In 2017 I am hoping for change: but not as a result of VR, mobile or micro-learning. I am hoping that we will adopt new approaches and new ways of thinking about learning, that in turn allow us to design experiences and resources that inspire and support learning in new ways (regardless of the technology to hand).

During the last couple of decades we have begun the process of marrying a new conception of learning to new capability sets. The result has been to redefine the process of learning design and the range of learning formats that we produce. And we have made some progress - the ambition of shifting ‘from courses to resources’ has spread, since I first talked about it five years ago, and it’s not uncommon to meet colleagues who are trying to effect this change.

(contd.)
So I thought this (below) might be a helpful visualisation. Like everything these days it’s a work in progress - definitely not perfect - but maybe something like a ‘destination postcard’ for learning professionals wondering what the future holds.

As a profession, we are a group of people with extraordinary potential: the potential to craft life-changing experiences, or to design resources that help productivity and engagement soar. But we will need to let go of convention, and swim to the surface.

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Nick Shackleton-Jones
An Anatomy of the Modern Learning Professional
Will virtual reality enable a truly global economy?

Listening to the latest episode of the From Scratch podcast, my friends Nigel Paine and Martin Couzins were discussing the new report from Maisie VRLearn, which focuses on current uses of Virtual Reality (VR) in learning. What struck me whilst listening to the examples Martin and Nigel shared were the opportunities for social mobility and the opening of a global market for skills and capability in a VR-enabled world.

Given the current political landscape, with many countries taking an isolationist stance in international relations, it’s an interesting juxtaposition. If larger companies can use a VR-enabled recruitment process to attract the best talent from an international pool of resource, it opens access and opportunity for individuals to access a global employment market.

Currently, widespread use of Virtual Reality for recruitment, virtual team working and education may be limited to the larger organisations and providers. But in comparison to the operational costs to provide these services or support global working on a global scale, the savings make the development investment worthwhile.

Connectivity and accessibility to appropriate hardware have a way to go to truly make this a global playing field, but it could indicate a direction of travel. There is certainly still huge disparity in access to good quality data networks.

However, organisations such as Learn Appeal are rolling out devices to bring connectivity to once remote communities and mobile data networks continue to drive an increase in global internet use (sources such as the 2015 Internet Usage report from the World Bank and the International Telecommunications Union report make interesting reading).

(contd.)
It could be that we see technologies such as VR and better support for virtual working actually driving further investment into connectivity as companies fight for the best global talent.

As the report is grounded in current uses of the technology, it also helps to bring Virtual Reality into the general narrative rather than a new or emergent approach. So it helps Learning and Development, Organisational Design and Business Process Improvement and many other business units have sensible and grounded conversations on enabling technology and its impact on the business.

There are economies of scale that are pulling many technologies, that may once have felt out of reach, onto the solutions menu.

It highlights yet again the importance of learning professionals embarking on true business engagement, analysis of key business processes, associated costs and current performance measures. VR will not answer all performance issues but an informed, agnostic approach which enables true business analysis supports the future of the professional and ultimately the success of the organisations we support.

Lisa is Head of Learning Solutions and Co-Founder of WillowDNA. As well as leading research and development into new approaches to learning Lisa also works on implementing online learning strategy, drawing on her experience from the implementation of global learning and knowledge-sharing tools and practices across the Orange group of companies.

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Let’s create a world where a happy workplace is the norm

The Guardian recently published an attack on “the cult of compulsory happiness ruining our workplaces” by Andre Spicer. He talks of companies who force their employees to dress as their favourite animal or introduce table football or video game areas.

Now I have chosen the job title Chief Happiness Officer and run a company called Happy, so I reckon I’m one of those “funsultants” that Andre is targeting. However I don’t actually know anybody who has been forced to dress as an animal (apart from at Walt Disney, where it can be your job) or who complains that their workplace is too play-like.

However I know a lot of people who complain that they have dictatorial managers, that they are told what to do, and live in fear of blame if something goes wrong. That is surely the reason that “the place we feel most miserable is [at] work”. It is absurd to suggest it is because too many companies are trying to make work more enjoyable.

In my standard speech on creating happy workplaces I give the example of somebody I know who was tasked with making people happier at work. He brought in games and hula hoops and made people have fun. He measured their happiness before and after … and their happiness went down.

I tell this story to emphasise that creating a happy workplace is not about the trivial and it’s certainly not about “making people have fun”. I guess I agree with Andre there. You can’t force people to be happy.

So what does make people motivated at work? Daniel Pink sums it up well:

“Mastery (doing something you are good at, and being able to get better), Autonomy (having the freedom to do it well) and Purpose (finding a real meaning in your work).”
Henry Stewart

Let's create a world where a happy workplace is the norm

There are companies that focus only on the surface elements. I remember visiting one telecoms company that had created an office that looked like Google, with quirky elements and free food. But there was so little trust that people didn't get paid one month when the finance manager was off sick, because nobody else was trusted to sign off the salary cheques. It was not a happy workplace, and people were leaving in droves.

However the companies that Spicer describes, like Zappos and Expedia, understand this very well. The reason they do well in the Best Workplace lists, the reason people say they love working there, is because they make sure people are doing work they are good at, and have the freedom and trust to do it well.

Spicer describes the problems at Nokia in being slow to respond to changes in the mobile phone market and puts it down to the pressure to be positive at all times. However it reads more to me like a classic case of top-down management, a blame culture where people are scared of being honest.

A key element of any happy workplace is openness and transparency. I recently heard James Whitehurst, Chief Executive of Red Hat, talk about one of his first meetings at the company back in 2007. A front line engineer spoke out, in front of his manager and manager’s manager as well as the CEO, stating that the technology they had chosen was wrong and they should be using another one he specified.

James was astonished. At the traditional airline company he had come from, it was unimaginable that a pilot would contradict his “superiors” in an open meeting like this. But that is the kind of honesty that you get if you create an open culture where mistakes are not only allowed but actively encouraged. (The engineer was right, by the way, and Red Hat soon changed tack.)

So I am in complete agreement with Andre Spicer that we need to end pointless restructures, remove forms and pointless processes and allow people to work flexibly. But those are key parts of helping a company create a happy workplace.

(contd.)
Spicer attacks the “cult of compulsory happiness”. Does this really exist? Maybe there are old-fashioned top-down cultures that try and enforce positivity or happiness. But none of the happy workplace consultants I know, and I reckon I know most of them, are trying to force anything.

We do hope, to use the words of Alex Kjerulf, to create a world where a happy workplace is the norm and not the exception.

That is a workplace where people to do work they are good at, get the trust and freedom to do it well and have managers that coach rather than tell. It is open and transparent, with diverse views welcome and a no-blame environment, where mistakes are simply a way to learn.

Wouldn’t you like to work somewhere like that?

Henry Stewart is founder and Chief Executive of London-based training business Happy Ltd. Happy was rated one of the top 20 workplaces in the UK for 5 successive years and now helps other organisations create happy workplaces. In 2011 Henry was listed in the Guru Radar of the Thinkers 50 list of the most influential business thinkers in the world. “He is one of the thinkers who we believe will shape the future of business”, explained list compiler Stuart Crainer.

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Embracing the principles behind growth mindset thinking are more likely to lead us to a breakthrough this year. Here’s an encouragement to all learning professionals, to think bigger and reflect on what you can do next.

As we go into 2017, it is clear that the aspirations of L&D leaders are higher than ever. Our ambition to improve efficiency, transform traditional approaches, boost performance, cultivate agility AND influence culture is at an all-time high. However, those of us that turn that ambition into a reality seems to be at an all-time low. Towards Maturity’s research over the last 13 years shows that this is a growing and uncomfortable trend. We need a breakthrough, fast!

So it is unsurprising that at this time of year we want to know *what’s hot and what’s not?* Everyone wants that quick shortcut that will see them through to the finishing post. What’s hot right now is the trend list - they are everywhere! What’s not so hot is Carol Dweck’s ideas around the growth mindset - an idea that has influenced education for many years but is now being questioned as other scientists fail to replicate her results.

Yet as we prepare to tackle 2017 head-on, I have a feeling that embracing the principles behind growth mindset thinking are more likely to lead us to a breakthrough year than slavishly following the trends.

7 mindset shifts that will make 2017 a breakthrough year for L&D

(continue)
Laura Overton

7 mindset shifts that will make 2017 a breakthrough year for L&D

Why we need to embrace a growth mindset

A fixed mindset, according to Dweck, is where people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success - without effort. Our friends at Internet Time Alliance compiled a list of 50 things that you think - if you have an old workplace mindset. They characterise innate attitudes that render our influence in the organisation, our control, our past successes our rigid definitions as defining, rigid and immovable.

The growth mindset on the other hand is where “…people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work - brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.”

The world is changing, our opportunities are changing and whilst we all have a mixture of both fixed and growth mindsets within us, I believe that shifting our attitudes will be fundamental to making difference to 2017 being a crushing year (or worse, a year of no change) to a breakthrough year.

We know from our research that top performing learning leaders are already achieving breakthroughs that others only dream of. Our latest report, Unlocking Potential, highlights some of the practical keys to their success. Having looked at this for some time, whilst their tactics are helpful to know, it is their attitude that underpins their success. How they embrace a type of growth mindset that counters old style thinking.

Here are just seven mindset shifts that we need to make for a breakthrough year in 2017:

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1. **Attitude to change: work it**

Change happens all around us - we can either use it as an excuse for lack of progress (the pace of technology change is ranked as an all time high by L&D professionals this year as a barrier to progress) or we can make a decision to work it to our advantage. Check out how Lynne Rutherford from Brambles decided to leverage a fundamental directive by the CEO to become ‘One company - One team’ to radically transform how the business perceived learning. Or see how Mike Booth – now at Vodafone - has continually used changing business circumstances to innovate and shift the way that learning is supported!

2. **Attitude to failure: learn from it**

Those with a fixed mindset look to protect their reputation at all costs – let’s keep what works! Top learning leaders like Mike and Lynne above have been willing to take (calculated!) risks across their careers; they experiment, try new things and learn from failure. It is an inherent attitude, not one influenced by their circumstances. We encourage others to learn from failure and set up stretch assignments to help them – we now need to embrace that ourselves.

3. **Attitude to the unfamiliar: explore it**

Data analysis, communication strategies, campaigns, knowledge mastery. The language of modern workplace learning is often very unfamiliar to the traditional trainer and training manager. Unfamiliar is scary! Fear causes us to retreat to safe territory, to the familiar, it’s only natural. What’s the alternative? Be open to exploring new ideas – look at the research, read the case studies, get in touch with the protagonists, ask questions. Exploring new ideas with an open mind does not commit you to action but the action you take as a result, however small, might be the breakthrough you need.

*(contd.)*
Laura Overton
7 mindset shifts that will make 2017 a breakthrough year for L&D

4. Attitude to cynicism: disrupt it

In Europe, many of us kick start the year with a trip to the Learning Technologies show in London. I’ve been going since it started years ago and it is great to catch up with old friends. However it’s a time when cynicism can abound, particularly with those who have been around a bit. After all, we’ve been talking about how the latest tech will change the world, about performance, the need to get managers on board, to communicate more for decades. These are not new ideas but our cynicism and fixed mindset thinking kicks in when we believe we see no change.

Whilst the concept of disruption is all the rage right now in L&D, fundamentally we need to apply the idea of radically transforming the norm to our own thinking, especially our cynicism. A growth mindset will ask – why no change? Was it that the time wasn’t right? Is the time right now? What can I do to make a difference now?

5. Attitude to technology: test it

In our latest study we have not found that any of the technologies that we explore (and there are at least 40 of them!) have a direct correlation to business impact. Come to think of it, the technologies we use haven’t correlated directly to impact in any of our studies with over 5,000 L&D leaders over the past 13 years.

Yet technology, used appropriately, will play a fundamental role in our success in 2017 when we get our attitude right. The fixed mindset tend to follow 3 routes either: 1) ignore it completely 2) add a few content libraries and an LMS to tick the box but change little else or 3) believe each new trend will be the savior of the world. The surprise in this year’s study wasn’t that top performing L&D leaders were embracing technology but they were more likely to be experimenting with new ideas, testing them to see if they will fit with the bigger picture, again embracing a type of ‘growth mindset’ that is open to new ideas and willing to flex.

The top trends are a good place to start – not to spot our favourites and pat ourselves on the back as a trend spotter, but to test our biases and build our awareness of what is out there that needs to be tested in the context of our own organisations.

(contd.)
6. Attitudes to you: believe in yourself

It was heartening to see that this year’s top learning teams were not led by those with a business or HR background but by those who have had a career in learning and development. However they have not rested on their early qualifications or their innate talent as people professionals. They actively built time to invest in their skills, their networks and their business experiences, looking for challenges and stretch assignments that took them out of their L&D comfort zone. Uncomfortable, undoubtedly!
An inherent attitude to growth, to not standing still, has meant that their belief that they can make a difference has meant that they have made more difference in their organisations.

And last but by no means least...

7. Attitude to opportunity: unlock it!

Times of dramatic political and global change provide an enormous opportunity for people professionals passionate about making a difference to individuals. This year, don’t let it freak you out – grab the opportunity and unlock the potential of yourself, your business and the individuals within your organisation!

Laura Overton is the founder and CEO of Towards Maturity – a not for profit benchmark practice that provides independent research to help organisations deliver improved performance through learning innovation. Her work is based on 30 years of practical experience in implementing technology enabled learning strategies for business advantage and is backed by her independent research.

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Getting Managers Ready Before They Start Managing People

How soon after promotion does your company start formally developing managers? After a few weeks? A few months? Ideally you’d catch them on Day One, right? Unfortunately, the reality is far from the ideal. I’ve known senior managers participating in their first formal management development several years after gaining the responsibility of managing people.

A recent article published in Fast Company, 3 Crucial Things I’ve Learning In My First 30 Days As A Manager, outlined a common reality for new managers, which is more about them finding things out for themselves than being adequately prepared to manage a team of people. As the author of the article writes:

“Here I am, writing the post that I want to read. And in my first month in a new management role, I’ve found these to be the three things I’ve had to sort out above all else.”

I love that the first thing she realises needs sorting out is: ‘What is this job, anyway?’ How many of your new managers find themselves in this position?

You’d hope you could rely on the resourcefulness of newly promoted managers to find their own way, wouldn’t you? They’ve displayed enough about themselves to warrant the position in the first place and must now step forward with purpose, curiosity and a determination to be the best manager they can be. But with this hope comes a real risk.

There are generally more first line managers than any other line of management in any given company and these people are directly responsible for the engagement and productivity of the vast majority of the workforce. However, according to a recent UK survey, nearly half (42%) of people have left a job because of a bad boss and almost a third of them feel their current boss is a bad manager.

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It seems to me that the majority of new managers are learning what the job is - and how to do it - from their own endeavours, finding out what works, what doesn’t work and (in the worst cases) what they can get away with. Habits (good and bad) are formed and previous experience is applied to new situations. And like the Peter Principle suggests, new managers use what’s worked for them in the past, until that fails and they find themselves promoted to a level of incompetence. But how much of this is down to being ill-prepared? If new managers are using what has worked for them in previous situations, isn’t that just being resourceful? How will they know any different if help is held outside of their grasp until they attend a programme?

Tens of billions of pounds are spent on management development programmes each year aimed at retrospectively instilling best practice and correcting bad habits following an often prolonged period of self-assimilation. Hmmm...? Something seems broken. But fortunately, it’s the 21st century and technology, constant connectivity and refined habits of web-search mean that there is an alternative available today...

**Influence the way new managers learn how to do their new job before they start and whilst they are learning about it**

The most powerful learning will happen at the moment of need and there will be plenty of these moments for new managers starting out on this path. So, rather than research and provide courses, provide digital resources that inform, equip and inspire them to follow trodden paths and learn from those who have successfully navigated the journey themselves.

Here are just a few moments of need you could be addressing today:

**Moment of need #1: My friends and family are asking me all about my new job and I don’t really know the answers to their questions**

Capitalise on the excitement of stepping up into management by providing the answer to the question: “What is the role of a manager at this company?” Do this by having existing managers, those who are already experienced and successful in comparable roles, share their responses to the question to make it real in the context of the organisation. Share these with new managers before they start in the job. This way, you can influence the way they start thinking about the type of manager they could be.

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Moment of need #2: I’m about to start this new job and I don’t know what will be expected of me
Day One can be daunting and overwhelming, so set up new managers to succeed by providing insights, tips and routines that you know work. Ask existing managers (you could choose the same ones as above) to share what they’d wish they’d known as they started managing people for the first time. Package their responses up as digital resources: videos, articles and blogs that can be accessed like the best of the web - but with your organisation’s context.

Moment of need #3: How do I create the right first impression with my new team?
It can be easy to oversimplify ways of being and activities that could lead to better first impressions but to provide example routines, of interactions and insights from managers who already have the experience can be hugely powerful. Think about how you could package up the shared experience of managers, each of whom will have their own management style.
And remember it’s not just about good first impressions, it’s about creating and embedding healthy habits and routines for managers to control the environment from which productive and happy employees can thrive. So how are your existing managers doing this?

Moment of need #4: There seems so much to do, how do I make time to do everything?
As one of the questions in the Fast Company article above suggests: how is it possible to do the work required and manage the team? This is not an easy question to answer but there are managers who get it right, so how do they think about the role and what do they actually do? If you can ask them and turn their responses into resources for the benefit of those new to the role then there is real benefit. Share models or frameworks that can be employed to help. Make this all as accessible as a refined Google search.

Moment of need #5: What do I not know that I need to know?
From engaging a disparate group of stakeholders; to profiling your team’s work; to developing your own organisational savvy, there are any number of things that new managers don’t know they don’t know. Find out from fairly new managers what questions they had and what they wish they’d known. Package the answers to these questions up as digital resources (articles, blogs and videos) with an actionable element to turn content consumption into positive action.

(contd.)
So, get where your new managers are and let technology <br>do the heavy lifting for you - and them

Today, it’s so easy to package up the experience and know-how of successful managers in short videos, blogs and articles - and then digital resources - that can be shared with your new managers to capitalise on their excitement, readiness and openness to learn. Think of these resources acting like a digital mentor (who is expert and experienced at all facets of management) who responds on-demand to your new managers’ taps on the shoulder. It’s real-life experience to help in real-life situations.

By answering their questions and guiding new managers based on actual ‘experience’ you immediately align your (L&D’s) efforts to the business, to what some of the most important people in your business need in order to succeed in their new jobs. And you can create these online resources as quickly as you could write an email.

More and more, companies are leading with digital resources to plug performance gaps and support their people with the work they are doing, whilst keeping them in the workflow. This approach mirrors the best of web-search via Google and YouTube, coupled with mobile accessibility, helping workers to be as enhanced and equipped at work as they are outside of the corporate infrastructure.

It’s not only quick, it’s much cheaper to provide digital resource than creating courses - and can be much more effective. You could create all of these resources for new managers today and be supporting them immediately. You can also refine the content in the resources over time so that they increase in value with every piece of feedback.

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What I’m not saying is that this approach replaces face-to-face, because if you’re not supporting and influencing managers before and as they take on their new role, then these resources are simply replacing ‘muddling through’ and ‘forming bad habits’. What I am saying is that you’ll have more success with your face-to-face management development efforts because you won’t be trying to reprogram managers, you’ll be building on much more solid foundations.

And you could be doing this for your new managers today. The technology is available, secure and advanced enough - and this methodology is tried, tested and working in organisations who are equipping their new managers before they start and guiding them in their new role based on what their most experienced managers know and do.

How much more successful could your new managers be if you did the same?

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