

# Competence in an ever-changing asset environment

How many times has it been said that people are our most valuable assets? Typically, assets are defined as items, things or entities that have potential or actual value to an organisation.<sup>1</sup> However, organisations rarely realise the true value of those assets without people.

This paper will look at the impact of the Internet of Things / Industry 4.0, the spread of technology and the impact it is having on people, how we train people and how we drive competence in our people in order to achieve the true value potential of our assets. So, let's have a look at these people that we rely on to deliver the value.

<sup>1</sup> ISO 55 000 definition

## Challenge 1: Closing the competence gap

Every organisation faces the challenge of an aging workforce that has skills and experience, and young, enthusiastic, tech-savvy people entering the workforce but lacking the knowledge or experience in many areas. But even more challenging, these young people use technology that often the aging workforce has yet to understand. Now let's add another ingredient to our challenge – the concept of **incompetence**, which can be subdivided into:

**Conscious incompetence** – I know I don't know this and it challenges me or overwhelms me.

**Unconscious incompetence** – I believe that I truly know something and consequently make significant errors of judgement in my work.

Learning and development of people entering the work-force is critical to helping them overcome the barriers to competence. In 2018 research by David Perring of the Fosway Group showed that learning is the top reason why people want join your organisation or leave it. The risk is that, by focusing on the traditional way of learning (let's call it cramming – because three to five days of immersion in new ideas shouldn't be called anything else), is more likely to result in an increase in **unconscious incompetence**.

Perhaps our solution lies in ensuring that those people that recognise that they are incompetent are provided with the training and access to learning material that allows them to find the knowledge that they need to grow their competence. While this has always been the goal of training it is going to fail miserably if we keep pushing the cramming method.

Let us also recognise that formal training is necessary to push the boundaries of learning, and to create the awareness of unconscious incompetence but when used it needs to be followed up by smaller learning interventions that are extremely informal and supportive.

## Challenge 2: The modern learner

Josh Bersin (Bersin by Deloitte) carried out extensive research on what he called **The Modern Learner**. He described today's employees as overwhelmed, distracted and impatient. They are hungry to learn and keen to grow their skills and if their employer won't help them, they will leave.

Today's employees are **untethered** – they frequently work somewhere other than their employer's location, and they are frequently contracting or freelancing in order to accommodate their lifestyle. They are accessing information **on-demand** via their smartphone, **collaboratively** from peers and colleagues, and often not from the traditional training content because the learning content has to be useful and relevant to them in their immediate situation. Kirstie Greany of Elucidat noted in her paper on people centred e-learning that the

average person gives a page of content around 7 seconds to decide if it is for them and 70% of users will leave if it's not optimised for them and their needs.

Today's employees also are looking to the future; as job roles become more fluid and their lifestyle expectations more flexible, they are looking out for the kinds of skills that will do them well into the future. Bersin stated in *The Modern Learner* that the half-life of professional skills was between 2.5 and 5 years and employees are constantly looking for integration between their learning and work – they want the learning to be as relevant and practical to their work situation as possible.

## The problems of today and the problems of tomorrow

In my mind we need to satisfy the short-term challenge of providing our employees with the skills and competence to meet the challenges of today while also thinking of the long term and creating a work environment that can provide learning and knowledge to the employee that is relevant, available and adaptive to their personalised requirements.

### Solving the problems of today

A starting point for many organisations is to ensure that there is an appropriate **organisational design and structural clarity** between the various role players. Unfortunately, there is no secret recipe to solving problems that can apply across industries and organisations, but the organisational systems must be aligned with the purpose and objectives of the organisation. Further, roles and responsibilities must be defined according to a RACI matrix (responsibility, accountability, consulted, informed) that clearly lists the applicable organisational management practices and the impact of the role. This process will highlight areas where competence gaps exist for the individuals in the role. The competence gaps can be used to manage career expectations and set targets for personal development.

Supporting this, there needs to be an **enabling “ecosystem”** for learning and development in the organisation – access to learning material that is easily available via smartphones, and the use of technology that enables employees to access information that is relevant and available in the moment of need. On top of that the content needs to bridge the 7-second rule because it is effectively curated. Again, technology provides the organisation with the opportunity to set up communities of practice that will enable learning through on the job experience, mentorship programmes, and collaboration and knowledge sharing between peers. Tools such as Slack, LinkedIn Learning, Degreed, Axonify, etc assist in providing, enabling and reinforcing learning.

Above all the modern learner wants to apply and be confident in their application of learning and this is where mentorship programmes and grooming by the experts of the past are needed to support the modern learner in the workplace.

### Solving the problems of tomorrow

Hagel, Brown and Wooll (Deloitte Insights) in their article “Skills change, but capabilities endure” report on how Toyota is compelling new employees to build motor cars by hand from scratch before they learn to assemble the vehicle on the assembly line. The intent is to ensure that these employees draw upon their imagination, creativity, problem-solving and experimentation capabilities so that they can ask the right questions when confronted by an unforeseen problem and develop new solutions.

At a time when the skill need is changing even more quickly, there is a focus on cultivating underlying essential human capabilities that will make the individual adaptable to the changing circumstances. Hagel, Brown and Wooll propose that organisations of the future will develop the following skills and capabilities:

**Emotional intelligence:** Understanding other people's emotions and experiences and how they shape human interactions

**Teaming:** Collaborating effectively across spatial, organisational and cultural boundaries

**Social intelligence:** Understanding interpersonal dynamics and behavioural impacts of human interactions

**Sense-making:** Creating awareness and meaning out of collective experiences

**Critical thinking:** Analysing, evaluating, synthesising and reconstructing information

**Adaptive thinking:** Recognising new patterns and applying patterns in new contexts

If one considers the skills and capabilities, they aren't new, they exist in all of us – we need to nurture and reward them because this will be the most sustainable way forward once we develop the critical mass that ensures our organisations enable these capabilities to thrive.

## Conclusion

The fourth industrial revolution, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and all the recent advances in technology will change the way we recruit, develop and retain skills and competence in the future. What we need most is people with the skills and capabilities to be flexible and adaptable in a fast-changing employment environment; we need adaptable learning to support the modern learner and you need to assess whether your organisation is nurturing and encouraging growth in those skills and capabilities otherwise you're sure to lose them.

## References:

Kirstie Greany – Senior Learning Consultant, Elucidat “People Centred elearning”.

David Perring – Director of Research, Fosway Group “Revolutionising the Learning Experience”.

Nick J. Howe – Training Industry “Closing the Competence Gap: Preparing Young Professionals for the Workforce”.

John Hagel, JohnSeely Brown, Maggie Wooll, Deloitte Insights “Skills change, but capabilities endure”.

Josh Bersin – Bersin by Deloitte “Meet the Modern Learner”.