



Reflections on the 2008 learning and development survey

Latest trends in learning, training and development

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Foreword

The CIPD's annual learning and development surveys provide us with opportunities to examine and explore current and emerging issues facing the profession. In recent years, we have accompanied the survey reports with a Reflections publication that aims to provide a wider context for and understanding of the issues raised. For this edition, which accompanies the 2008 Learning and Development survey report, we invited four leading commentators to reflect on different aspects of the survey findings and to identify the main implications of the findings for practitioners and the organisations they work for.

- As skills shortages remain a difficulty for many organisations, **Roger Opie** explores the future skill needs of the UK from the perspective of how we prepare young people to be the workforce of the future.
- **Martyn Sloman** examines the changes that have taken place in learning and development over the past decade and looks to what the future has in store.
- At the beginning of the decade, there was huge interest in e-learning. Does the interest continue, and how far has e-learning lived up to expectations so far? **Donald H. Taylor** investigates these questions, and asks whether shifts in the learning and development profession's attitude to e-learning suggests that the profession itself is changing.
- The use of coaching is now widespread within organisations, but is there clarity emerging around the purpose of coaching? **Martin Howe** suggests that coaching is at a crossroads and examines the choices that organisations face.

We hope you enjoy reading these short 'think-pieces' and that they give you some insights into current issues facing learning, training and development practitioners.

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The CIPD's annual learning and development surveys can be downloaded from the CIPD website (www.cipd.co.uk/surveys).

Roger Opie is Director of the HTI (Heads, Teachers and Industry) Trust, which has a powerful influential voice on education and employability policy matters that impact on business.

Roger spent 18 years in secondary education as a headteacher, deputy head and head of department. He then became Director of Industrial Society Education where for 15 years he led programmes on education leadership, employability and corporate social responsibility.

He is an enthusiastic campaigner for greater understanding between business and education. He writes and broadcasts on education, employability, recruitment and training issues. He is a fellow of the RSA, a member of the Institute of Directors, a trustee of charities and serves on national bodies. His views are respected across government, business and education. Roger has recently been elected as a Freeman of the City of London's Guild of Educators.

The 'four camps' of employee skills

Roger Opie

This essay examines the future skill needs of the UK from the perspective of how we prepare young people for the workforce of the future – within the context of the findings of the 2008 CIPD *Learning and Development* survey and the goals set out in the *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy: world class skills* (2006).

Leitch points out that:

- out of 30 OECD countries, the UK is 17th on low skills, 20th on intermediate skills and 11th on high skills
- 5 million adults in the UK lack functional literacy
- 17 million adults in the UK have difficulty with numbers
- more than one in six young people in the UK leave school unable to read, write or add up properly.

While many businesses have been quick to condemn failings in our education system, it is alarming that the CIPD survey has 53% of respondents not being influenced by the Leitch report and only 29% influenced to some extent. One feels for the 3% influenced to a greater extent.

Current reforms leading to radical reforms in our 14–19 education system reveal great concern at the lack of employer engagement in the vocational elements that are aimed at raising both functional and sector-specific skills. This begs the obvious question as to where accountability lies for developing skills in young people.

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It is far too easy to criticise government schemes, schools, colleges and even universities for turning out

students with poor employability skills. It is surely time that we look at shared responsibility.

The survey tells us that 46% strongly agree that it is the Government's responsibility to see that young people are educated to appropriate standards before entering the workforce. Only 13% of employers strongly agree that they have a responsibility to raise literacy and numeracy standards within the workforce. This dependency on 'the system' to provide the workforce is further highlighted in the response to the question around implementing initiatives. While 78% provide vocational or occupational-specific training for staff and 52% are involved in NVQs/SVQs, the number that have signed the Employer Skills Pledge and that are involved in foundation degrees or government-sponsored apprenticeships is worryingly low.

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While one accepts that a high proportion of the current workforce will be in the 2020 mix, it is important to realise that young people currently in our education system need preparing for their role. Current primary school children will be part of this 2020 workforce and are forecasted to be working well beyond our current retirement age. It is critical, therefore, while not ignoring the upskilling of older workers, that we examine developments in our schools and colleges.

It is evident that progress can only be made if there is a serious commitment across sectors from education, business and government to work purposefully together to see that by 2020 young people are equipped in functional, generic and sector-specific skills. Currently education and business have people who sit in four different camps. We have **cynics**, who

knock the system; **dinosaurs**, who resist change; **spectators** in the stands, who support initiatives but do not engage with the action; and **players** 'on the pitch', who are part of the real action. We initially need those in the stands to be on the pitch with enthusiasm, energy -kicking in the same direction.

It is also fair to claim that respondents to the CIPD survey sit in these four camps!

Before looking at the four camps, it's interesting to consider the survey's findings on the criteria and skills expected in new employees – where interpersonal (79%) and communication (68%) are viewed as very important. The expectations of new recruits in joining a values-led organisation are reflected in 54% recognising this as very important. Is it significant that IT is low at 20% or does this reflect that young people in particular are making themselves work-ready through becoming self- and peer-group-taught?

Lord Digby Jones has long talked of the UK becoming a value-added economy. This is brought home by 40% of respondents looking for a higher level of skills than two years ago and 61% needing a broader range of skills. Looking two years ahead, 90% needing increased leadership and management skills is challenging but has long been recognised by training providers. Sixty-four per cent seeking improved customer services skills is being reflected in the efforts of most customer-facing sector skills councils and, for example, a high priority for GoSkills (the sector skills council that represents passenger transport).

While there is high-level agreement on the skills required, there is more expectation of new recruits obtaining these skills than there is agreement on who is accountable for delivering the training for potential employees to acquire them.

Our cynics tend to be well informed about the range of initiatives, but it's worrying that 25% of respondents do not see Train to Gain as relevant.

The first of our camps could be labelled the **cynics**. Our cynics tend to be well informed about the range of initiatives, but it's worrying that 25% of respondents do not see Train to Gain as relevant. With 66% pointing to

deficiencies in communication and interpersonal skills and 54% to lack of leadership and management skills in those leaving education, there are worrying trends. These same cynics will claim too many qualifications exist without adopting a pick-and-mix approach. Equally they question foundation degrees as well as saying that university degrees fail to make graduates employable.

High levels of cynicism surround government intent to raise the participation age in education and training to 18. Alison Wolf of King's College London in her Policy Exchange pamphlet goes as far as to claim it will infringe civil liberties and wreck the market for youth employment while providing qualifications that have little or no market value.

Cynics also point to an apparent inability to reduce the number of NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training Schemes), with a national average of around 10%, rising to over 20% in some areas.

Dinosaurs are clearly among the 53% not influenced by Leitch and the 25% not considering placing an increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy training for employees. They also are quick (87%) to see government as solely responsible for education. Mercifully real dinosaurs tend to be small in number and will not be employers engaged in the new 14–19 diplomas or impacting on information, advice and guidance (IAG). It would be expensive and a waste of time to spend too long trying to win them over.

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Spectators can be moved on to the pitch to become genuine players with little persuasion. If 37% are considering signing the Skills Pledge and 33% considering foundation degrees, they recognise their value and often need little persuasion to engage. Many companies see engagement with schools and colleges as a token corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda item. But it also has to be fully integrated into HR strategy.

The **players** on the pitch may need coaching at levels of motivation but are clear on goals and the pitch they are on. The 13% who have signed the Skills Pledge and

the 25% engaged in Train to Gain need boosting, but it is encouraging that 78% are developing vocational and occupational training schemes. However, Leitch clearly emphasises the future of apprenticeships and will expect more than 30% to be supportive.

Efforts have to be made to see that more players are working with their relevant sector skills council, engaged in work-related learning as the new 14–19

diplomas are rolled out from September 2008, embracing foundation degrees and developing work cultures that embrace personalised learning. Leitch has endorsed sector skills councils, which now need to further engage with businesses in their sectors and give even more leadership on the 14–19 diplomas and sector-specific IAG. At this stage it is worrying that employability-led diplomas are lacking employer engagement and that IAG is inadequate for large numbers of young people.

Implications for practitioners

A cross-sector call to action has to include the following:

- **Education and training** must somehow demonstrate a simplified set of qualifications and clearly articulate the requests for employer engagement in aspects of work-related learning.
- Raising the participation age to 18 will require co-ordination across schools, colleges and training providers.
- Schools and colleges must major on functional skills, personalised learning and the 14–19 diplomas.
- **Government** must really sort IAG to ensure all young people receive sound and impartial advice through national quality standards.
- Focus needs to be given to promote high-level initiatives to employers, who often lack understanding of the diplomas, apprenticeship schemes and foundation degrees.
- The new Commission on Employment and Skills has to impact across sectors.
- **Business** must be prepared to understand relevant initiatives, identify and work with sector skills councils and, above all, devote time to actively working with schools and colleges to impact on skills.
- Apprenticeships are critical to our success and increased investment is vital. (Leitch wants an annual increase of 500,000).
- Business is aware that a high proportion of the 2020 workforce are already in employment. This must not, however, be an excuse to avoid working with all phases of education to ensure ongoing upskilling throughout the century. Leitch is calling for 95% of the population to have good basic functional skills by 2020 and for 90% to be skilled to GCSE level.
- **All** must appreciate that Leitch targets are for 2020, but cross-sector action is needed now. And as Lord Leitch concludes: 'Skills were once a key lever for prosperity and fairness. Skills are now increasingly the key lever.'

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In his roles as author, lecturer and conference speaker, he has contributed to the development of modern HR concepts and practice. His book, *The E-learning Revolution: From propositions to action* (CIPD 2001), presented 21 separate propositions, while *A Handbook for Training Strategy* (Gower 1994) has been translated into Polish and published in India and China. A second edition appeared in 1999. In October 2003, *Training in the Age of the Learner* was published by the CIPD and considered the implications of the shift from training as an intervention to learning as an activity. His latest book, *The Changing World of the Trainer* (2007), considers the global aspects of learning, training and development.

Martyn is a visiting professor in HR development at Caledonian Business School, Glasgow Caledonian University, a visiting professor at Kingston Business School, Kingston University, and a teaching fellow in the Department of Management and Organisational Psychology, Birkbeck College, University of London. He has lectured and presented to conferences and colleges in over 15 countries across four continents. He has been the keynote speaker at the European Commission Training Day in Brussels and has spoken by invitation to the Central Training Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Learning and development – from top-down to support and challenge

Martyn Sloman

One of my favourite quotations runs as follows: 'It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.' This aphorism is widely attributed to the post-war US President Harry S. Truman.

However, as a search of the Internet will demonstrate, while everyone seems to agree on the likely author, the provenance is uncertain. No one knows whether he actually said it. Given the underlying sentiment, Truman would have probably appreciated the irony.

What is important is that this quotation seems to sum up the lot of the trainer today – if the results of our latest CIPD annual *Learning and Development* survey are anything to go by. It is evident that our role has

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changed significantly. Working through others and achieving change by influence rather than immediate personal intervention is what lies ahead. What this year's survey has revealed is two main areas that demand attention, and where new thinking would assist. One concerns what will be described as learning through 'support and challenge'; the other concerns the monitoring of effectiveness. Both are discussed in detail below.

The phrase 'support and challenge' describes a range of interventions which, through skilful mediation, encourage recipients in the workplace to find within themselves a way forward. To quote from the output of a global CIPD research project:

In many cases, a desirable intervention will be a mixture of support (encouraging the learner to display confidence in their own capabilities and thus construct their own learning agenda) and challenge (demanding that a wide range of options are considered and the self-inspired objectives stretches the owner) (Sloman 2007).

'Support and challenge' is the most effective way for people to acquire job-related skills and knowledge; however, it is most difficult to manage and to monitor. Support and challenge involves a range of activities, not all of which are under the control for the trainer or learning and development manager – hence the choice of the opening quotation for this essay.

The 2008 survey sought information on learning and development practices; more specifically it asked which practices had increased over the last two years. The two that recorded the highest 'use more' percentages were in-house development programmes (61%) and coaching by line managers (53%). The rise in in-house development programmes can be considered alongside an almost static position on instructor-led training delivered off the job (here 25% reported an increase, 9% a reduction, 49% stayed the same and 11% were non-users).

What we are witnessing here – and we are seeing this pattern continually emerging in conference presentations and offers of case studies – is a shift away from menu-led sheep-dip training. Today's management development event is more tailored to the individual: there is a greater emphasis on learning through projects; there is increased value seen in learning with and from peers.

Moving to other results, a desire to create a coaching culture and the role of the line manager as coach has been the dominant theme of the last five years. It has been the subject of continuing CIPD research (Hutchinson and Purcell 2007). When respondents were asked to identify all the changes in delivery methods that had occurred over the last two years, 'new programmes to develop the role of line managers' was ticked by almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents. It was the leader by a considerable margin.

The reason for this general shift away from the more formal instructor-led approach is evident elsewhere in the survey. Respondents were asked to identify the most effective learning and development practices. The top three, in order, were: in-house development programmes (55%), coaching by line managers (53%) and on-the-job training (43%). This shift to customised or tailored learning can be said to reflect both learner preferences and organisational requirements. Our 2005 survey *Who Learns at Work?* (CIPD) indicated that learners prefer active rather than passive learning. Respondents' clearly preferred method of learning was being shown something and then practising it. Only 19% of respondents in this survey stated that being taught in a meeting room or classroom was the best method of learning for them. This repeated a similar set of findings from a survey that took place three years earlier (CIPD 2002).

...the skills that learners believe we value/are valued in organisations are changing.

Moreover, the skills that learners believe we value/are valued in organisations are changing. Last year a significant new survey of learners was published. *Skills at Work 1986–2006* (Felstead et al 2007) was based on data drawn from 4,800 face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of people aged between 20 and 65 who were in work in Britain. The survey had important messages for the HR professional. It reported a dramatic increase in the number of jobs that use automated or computerised equipment. Further, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of jobs in which computing is considered to be an essential component of the job – 47% (nearly

half the workforce) now report that they fall into this category. The numbers reporting a 'simple' use of computers is dropping. There have also been substantial increases in the importance of the following skills: writing long documents; writing short documents; making speeches and presentations; persuading and influencing other people; instructing and analysing complex problems in depth. These form many of the ingredients of a composite skill index that the skills-at-work researchers labelled influencing skills. Another set of skills, labelled 'technical know-how', have increased substantially in importance.

Although we did not ask this style of question in our CIPD survey, we did ask respondents which criteria were important in recruiting new employees. Interpersonal skills (79%) and communication skills (68%) were the top two identified as very important. The underlying point here is that both computer skills and interpersonal and communication capability are not gained by knowledge transfer from an instructor, but are skills acquired and developed through practice and feedback in the workplace. 'Support and challenge' has arrived.

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However, as has been widely recognised, it is much easier to report on top-down training instruction than informal learning activities. Traditional evaluation is based on seeing training as a series of events where it is possible to isolate and measure effects, rather than a holistic system designed to increase learning. This raises real dilemmas for today's training and development professional when it comes to demonstrating value.

The CIPD survey also looks to the future. It asks what will be the major changes affecting learning and development in organisations over the next five years. The two top answers were: 'closer integration of learning and development activity and business strategy' (68%) and 'more emphasis on monitoring / measurement / evaluation of training effectiveness' (56%).

Another recent CIPD research project has shown that these two activities are closely linked. Our work on the value of learning (Anderson 2007) has revealed a need for a new approach. Our fieldwork showed that return on investment measures – for so long considered to be the ‘holy grail’ for learning, training and development professionals – are of limited interest to senior decision-makers. Attention is shifting from focusing on return-on-investment to return-on-expectation measures of value. Return-on-expectation measures make use of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ information and assess the extent to which the anticipated benefits of the learning investment have been realised.

What is evident from the survey as a whole – and from the section on the future in particular – is that

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exciting new challenges lie ahead. How different things were 30 years ago when I started in training – we were judged in our capability to instruct and little else. My baptism took place in the National Coal Board. We used the phrase ‘ed-work’ to describe anything difficult – anything that required more than a clout with a spanner or a pick axe. I never saw it written down, but I guess it would be ‘head-work’. Evidently we will have a lot of ed-work to do as we go forward into the next decade.

Implications for practitioners

- Less formal and less controlled interventions based on ‘support and challenge’ are growing in importance.
- Future skills requirements and learner preferences underline a shift away from top-down instructional models.
- Recognise that we will increasingly work through others in the organisation, particularly line managers.
- Recording and reporting on learning rather than training is difficult, so consider an approach based on return on expectation.
- Exciting challenges lie ahead, so be prepared for further change.

Donald H. Taylor is Chairman of the Learning Technologies Conference, one of the UK's leading gatherings for technology-supported learning in the workplace. He is also a non-executive director at capability management software provider InfoBasis Ltd and at the Institute of IT Training.

He has 20 years' experience in the fields of IT and skills. Over that time he has developed a keen sense for differentiating between the hype and the reality of technology-supported learning and development. He is particularly concerned with encouraging learning and development to move from reactively supplying training courses to engaging with organisational strategy and proactively providing information to influence that strategy and ensure its success.

In previous positions, Donald has taken his own Internet company from concept to trade sale, and held delivery, management and board positions with training companies.

Donald sits on various UK non-profit councils and boards to promote technology-supported learning and development in the workplace. He contributes regularly to industry magazines, both online and offline, and blogs at www.donaldhtaylor.co.uk

The role of e-learning in the learning mix

Donald H. Taylor

At first glance the CIPD 2008 *Learning and Development* survey is a mess of contradictions on e-learning. Just 7% of those polled regard it as among the most effective learning and development practices, yet 57% of organisations use it and 27% of the remainder plan to use it within 12 months. While only 8% of those who use e-learning as a learning and development intervention would rate it as 'very effective', 64% believe it is 'fairly effective'.

Yet these figures, which might smack of woolly thinking, actually tell a clear story of changing attitudes to learning technologies. They are also part of a fundamental change occurring within the learning and development function itself.

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The most important thing about these figures is that we can believe them. They are not the frothy enthusiasms of vendors and early adopters; they reflect actual learning and development practice today. And the message is simple: for those that use it, e-learning is now simply regarded as part of the learning mix, and practitioners are increasingly confident with it. In this survey in 2002, 54% agreed that 'e-learning involves the possibility of wasting a lot of money', a figure that six years later has dropped to 38%, with just 14% agreeing strongly. The intelligent customer has arrived.

If people know what they're doing with e-learning, this explains why only 7% considered it a 'most

effective' practice. For them, this phrasing makes no sense. You might as well ask whether books are an effective learning practice. E-learning is a medium of delivery. Any effectiveness depends not on the medium itself, but how it is used. Those familiar with e-learning will almost certainly be using it as one part of a delivery strategy that also includes, for example, classroom delivery and book-based self-study.

Six years ago, the question could have made sense, because e-learning then implied something quite narrow. In 2002, e-learning essentially meant the delivery of courses. In providing materials and a structure for self-study, it was similar to its predecessors computer-based training (CBT) and computer-assisted learning (CAL). E-learning added to these the concept of central planning and tracking via the learning management system (LMS). In 2002, e-learning for most people meant an electronic analogy of the classroom: courses that were centrally prepared or commissioned, with attendance and assessment data collected by the learning and development.

E-learning has come a long way since then.

In the absence of any agreed definition of e-learning, those polled for this CIPD survey will have taken e-learning to include the much wider range of electronically delivered learning materials available in 2008, from LMS-delivered courses to electronic performance support systems (EPSS), to the use of social networks and Google to support informal learning.

This broad understanding of the meaning of e-learning will explain why – in spite of the apparent

contradiction of only 7% rating it among the most effective training practices – 47% of respondents said they used it more than they did two years ago. Of a list of 13 practices, this was the third greatest increase.

But if it is being used widely, the survey suggests that it is not being used very effectively. Although 52% of those using e-learning claim it is 'offered to' 75–100% of employees, 57% say that only 0–25% actually 'take it up'. This explains why 66% of respondents estimate that less than 10% of 'total training time' is delivered by e-learning.

Again, though, the wording of these questions invites the respondent to consider the narrow definition of e-learning. The very phrases 'offered to', 'taken up' and 'total training time' suggest online courses and the centralised world of the LMS. If the survey had asked, 'What proportion of your employees use Google, or access an online help system, or email/IM colleagues for assistance?', the results would certainly have been different.

In other words, where the questions are not worded to restrict the sense of what e-learning means, this survey shows comprehensively that in practice it has gone through the five stages of the Gartner hype cycle and is now resolutely past the trough of disillusionment and up on the plateau of productivity. The key statistic here: 65% of respondents strongly agree it is more effective when used with other forms of learning. E-learning is now simply part of the mix.

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People don't necessarily find e-learning easy (80% rightly say it requires new skills for learning and development practitioners), but it is no longer regarded as revolutionary. Six years ago it excited the profession: 34% agreed with the statement that 'e-learning will significantly alter our training offerings'. When this year's survey asked for 'the major change affecting organisational learning and development over the next five years', the CIPD did not even include e-learning among the options offered and nobody mentioned it under the catch-all answer of 'other'.

It has taken e-learning about ten years to reach this state of maturity. In 2008, as in every year, we can expect other learning technologies to come to the fore, which could still be grouped under the widening banner of 'e-learning'. Most of them will already be familiar, and their extension into the learning field will be part of the natural extension of what e-learning means. It has already moved away from a centralised to a more diffuse idea of learning, and these new

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technologies will continue that movement. Social networking and instant messaging will join tools such as email and 'webinars' among technologies that can be used to support learning, but can do much more besides. They will be part of a trend taking technology-supported learning away from page-turning on the screen to being a social experience, and from centralised 'push', to individually driven 'pull'.

It is difficult to imagine, given the results of this survey in comparison with that of 2003, that any of these tools will have the dramatic impact on perception (if not on reality) that e-learning did in the early part of the decade. The learning and development professional is just too savvy now. And this acceptance of e-learning as one of many tools reflects an important change in the learning and development function's priorities. As noted above, when asked to identify 'the major change affecting organisational learning and development over the next five years', respondents did not answer 'e-learning'. The most popular answer, significantly ahead of the others, was: 'closer integration of learning and development activity and business strategy'.

In his essay for last year's Reflections report, Charles Jennings of Reuters bemoaned the fact that only 56% of organisations had a written learning and development strategy. He pointed out that it would be inconceivable for a chief executive not to have an explicit strategy and suggested that it should be as inconceivable for a learning and development department not to have one either.

The survey clearly shows that the profession understands this, and will rightly subjugate matters of delivery issues to the greater concern of coupling learning and development activity to organisational goals. Learning technologies will never drive this strategy, but they have a role to play in delivering it, and – importantly – in feeding information back into it.

E-learning and other learning technologies are essentially methods of ensuring content delivery like other delivery mechanisms from the classroom to the bookcase. The way they can produce strategically useful data, however, is unique. 'Strategically useful data' does not include activity measures for the department, such as number of days of training delivered. Rather, strategy is concerned with hard data such as the average skills gap per employee – which the learning and development department can gather in learning technologies systems, and which is vital for assessing organisational readiness. It is also concerned with softer data such as information on employees' preferred ways of gathering information – do they

prefer social networking tools, 'wikis' or the Internet, for example, and how might this affect future spend on tools for workplace learning?

This collection of data is something that only learning technologies can provide, and goes well beyond how we thought of e-learning at the beginning of the decade.

For some in learning and development, this new world will be uncomfortable.

For some in learning and development, this new world will be uncomfortable. It is far away from the classroom delivery model that most learning and development professionals began their careers in. Uncomfortable it may be, but it moves learning and development from the junior role of fulfilment to the real reason it exists: to improve organisational effectiveness. Because of that, it is also a world of opportunity, and learning technologies such as e-learning have a key role to play in it.

Implications for practitioners

- Don't do e-learning to tick a box. If you are one of the 57% of organisations with a 0–25% take-up of e-learning, ask yourself what you can do to improve this number. If you cannot, consider whether the money could be better spent elsewhere.
- Investigate your organisation's current informal use of e-learning. Do employees poll peers in other organisations via social networking tools? How much do they use Google? Where can the learning and development department help in providing swifter access to well-qualified experts, and online access to rich, sure sources of information?
- You are not alone. Network with your peers in other organisations to share good practice in the implementation of learning technologies.
- Establish how learning technologies can provide the data demanded by your organisational learning and development strategy. If you don't have a strategy, write one.

As the Cega Group's Training and Development Manager, **Martin Howe** is responsible for the overall strategy to consistently deliver high-quality customer care and specialist technical services to the travel and private medical insurance sectors. Blended learning programmes, across three core businesses employing 350 staff, provide world class outsourced contact centre services.

Before joining Cega, Martin was a regional manager with Bennington Training Services, overseeing training projects in five district centres providing employability courses, job-focused skills training, work-based learning and outplacement services.

Graduating with a BA honours degree, Martin started his career with the John Lewis Partnership. Martin went on to achieve a masters degree from Manchester and a postgraduate diploma in human resource management from Portsmouth University. Current research, into the impact of coaching, will form part of an MSc dissertation, supervised by Professor Charlotte Raynor.

During 2007 Martin was an active participant in the CIPD-commissioned collaborative inquiry research into developing coaching capability within UK organisations.

Martin is an experienced conference speaker and very effective communicator. Most recently, insights into the alignment of coaching with learning and development strategies and organisational objectives were presented in a seminar at the CIPD autumn 2007 Coaching at Work Conference.

Coaching at the crossroads – is it enough to position coaching activities with line managers?

Martin Howe

The results of the 2008 CIPD *Learning and Development* survey suggest that coaching may be at a crossroads. A strategic choice is emerging between leaving coaching activity positioned with line managers and their direct reports, or using designated internal coaches and fully trained peer coaches to embed a 'coaching culture' that, fully aligned with organisational objectives, pervades every aspect of corporate life.

...workplace based coaching has moved beyond being the latest fad and is here to stay.

Surely, over the last ten years, workplace-based coaching has moved beyond being 'the latest fad' and is here to stay. The decline reported in 2007 has been reversed, with 71% of organisations now claiming to be using coaching in some form – but what does this really mean? It would seem that coaching is still the least understood learning intervention. This may explain the discrepancies in reporting coaching activity in recent years as organisations grapple with the central issue of what actually constitutes coaching. Of more concern is the murky picture painted by organisations undertaking coaching. There is still no great clarity emerging around the purpose of coaching.

The easier choice of pathway at this crossroads is to remain in relative confusion, by tacking coaching on to an ever-growing list of line manager responsibilities, as if it were just another devolved HR function. The harder road leads to a clear, embedded, fully aligned strategy that deploys dedicated coaches to impregnate the entire organisational culture. It is the more difficult option because it involves engagement at every level and the commitment of resources to training internal coaches. It is sad, but hardly surprising then, that only a quarter of

respondents formally write coaching into their learning and development strategy.

The total number of organisations using coaching is bolstered by the high number of respondents (80%) who report that line managers are using 'coaching' methods, in some form, with the staff they have responsibility for. The highest percentage of respondents (36%) reported that the *main* responsibility for delivering coaching within their organisation lies with their line managers. While some organisations are prepared to give at least some basic coaching training to line managers, there is less evidence of a commitment to develop staff whose only job is coaching. Specialist internal coaches have the main responsibility for delivering coaching in only 14% of organisations. Can you build a coaching culture without dedicated internal coaches?

At a time of unprecedented, exponential change, coaching can help to deliver significant transformation.

At a time of unprecedented, exponential change, coaching can help to deliver significant transformation. Vakola, Soderquist and Prastacos (2007) argue for a change of emphasis from 'what managers currently do' to what is needed for effective performance in the future by 'defining the right mix of skills and behaviours individuals would need to possess' to deliver the business strategy. The tackling of underachievement and 'acquisitional' skills development provided by 'operational' coaching is certainly helpful, but if the strategic imperative is driven by change and differentiation, then consistent 'transformational coaching' needs to be in place (CIPD 2007b). While the operational coaching provided by line managers may produce a number of performance-related benefits, it is

the transformation delivered by dedicated internal coaches that will add value through lasting behavioural change. With the emphasis on line managers conducting 'operational' coaching, is there a danger of missing out on 'transformational coaching'?

It is now accepted that 'the quality of the coaching relationship is the single most important determinant of success in coaching' (CIPD 2007a). Is it really possible for line managers to create the environment in which a credible transformational coaching relationship can thrive? There are a number of reasons why line managers – coaching staff they have responsibility for – may find it difficult to deliver transformational coaching:

- *Developing deep rapport.* Ideally, teams are carefully put together to ensure a healthy balance of qualities and personalities. However, the reality is that, on many occasions, managers inherit a team, whose replenishment is driven by organisational necessity. Even where the coaching training for line managers has been excellent, the level of rapport required for transformational behavioural change may not always be possible with every team member.
- *Boundary issues.* There is an understandable reluctance to share personal issues with a line manager who has influence over future roles. This does not, on the whole, allow the exploration of limiting beliefs, or barriers to behavioural change, that lie outside work.
- *Emotional awareness.* Line managers are not best placed to harness the power of emotion. This is because it is harder to explore the link between emotion and motivation with a direct report, where an 'emotional' response may be interpreted as weakness. This link is particularly relevant to coaching because 'its success is often attributed to client motivation' (Backirova and Cox 2007).
- *Quality time.* Even where coaching is being facilitated successfully, do line managers really have the time? 'With flattened pyramids, increased spans of control and just the general pace of organizational life... many managers now have over ten direct reports' (Cunningham 2007, p4) to

coach. Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005) found that 'coaching behaviours tend to be abandoned in the face of more urgent, if less important, demands on (top) managers' time' (p232).

- *Mixed motives.* Ten years ago Leat and Lovell (1997) demonstrated the difficulty of combining a number of objectives within the line management relationship, arguing that combining remedial, maintenance, development and reward outcomes is just too challenging. While dealing with underachievement or disappointing performance issues it may not be possible to also address individual developmental aspirations. These variant objectives can lead to a real tension that occurs when a supervisor has to simultaneously be 'coach' and 'judge'. Can a line manager really be both a developmental coach, looking to the future, and a dispassionate assessor of past performance, especially where there is a performance-related element to the reward package?

A surprisingly high number (44%) of organisations offer coaching to all employees, but if this is through their own line manager, largely for remedial purposes (74%, rising to 80% in the private sector), how effectively is this contributing towards achieving visionary organisational

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objectives? Should organisations be more honest about the temptation to wrap up corrective action in a sugary coating of coaching vocabulary? No wonder only 12% of participants think coaching is 'very effective'. An alarming one in five organisations using coaching are not even evaluating its effectiveness at all!

Why is there an apparent unwillingness to evaluate coaching? Is it because what some organisations seem to be doing – encouraging line managers to exhibit coach-like behaviour – is not actually coaching at all? It may be unfair to declare that the 'emperor has no clothes', but there is massive potential in many organisations to do so much more to create a coaching culture where dedicated transformational relationships are bringing distinctive competitive advantage and organisational success.

The choice at this crossroads appears to be between, on the one hand, using line managers as part of a blended learning approach, as one weapon in the performance enhancement armoury – 61% of respondents reported using coaching as part of a wider management development programme. This tends to isolate the coaching offering from the organisational culture. On the other hand, the use of dedicated internal coaches can help to establish coaching as part of the mainstream organisational change agenda, as a distinctive new Unwritten Ground Rule (UGR®) (Simpson 2007). This equates to Clutterbuck and Megginson's 'embedded stage' of measuring progress towards a coaching culture, where 'people at all levels are engaged in coaching, both formal and informal, with colleagues both within the same function and across functions and levels' (2005, p233). Changing to a 'coaching and collaboration' culture at Vodafone meant that the 'coaching approach' to management was integral. One of the key discoveries was 'the importance of building a coaching ethos from the top-down' (Eaton and Brown 2002).

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The danger, if nothing changes, is that a reliance on line managers attempting to coach, as one of many responsibilities, will take coaching down a path away from a coherent, aligned strategy to a fog of blurred boundaries. The reality is, of course, that most organisations are on a journey, deploying a whole mix of strategies including 'systematic', 'emergent' and 'tailored middle ground' (CIPD 2007a). The direction of the journey depends on the quality of response to a number of key challenges faced by the coaching community at a time of unprecedented change and increasing demands for flexibility, where only the versatile survive. The challenge is to create the case for dedicated internal coaches creating relationships that radically change attitudes and behaviour throughout the organisation to produce an atmosphere where coaching is truly 'the way we do things around here'.

Implications for practitioners

Challenges for the next ten years

- To clarify what coaching is and, more importantly, what it is not!
- To have a clearer understanding of 'how' coaching works. Insights from the world of neuroscience may provide further evidence for the benefits of coaching, helping to construct a sound business case for dedicated internal coaches. (See, for example, the work of David Rock (2006).)
- To harness the power of emotion. Emotions are proving to be very powerful drivers for positive change.
- To establish a clearer correlation between coaching interventions, performance improvements and key organisational targets, by evidencing the impact of coaching.
- To develop strategies aimed at increasing the number of dedicated internal coaches, including those who are peers of the coachees. This can avoid some of the pitfalls associated with the limiting line manager relationship. However, the training of internal coaches to secure deeper impact needs to involve a 'spaced learning approach over a number of weeks (which) provides better results than short, intensive programmes' (Grant 2007).

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