



Learning and Development Trends That Lead to High Performance

By

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Learning and development practitioners should care about trends because business conditions change fast. Practitioners who do not reflect on trends may be victimized by developing problems that could have been avoided with some forethought. The old saying “those who do not know the past are doomed to repeat it” would also be wise to know of a new saying: “those who do not plan for future challenges will fall prey to them.”

But what are some future challenges affecting the global work, workforce, workplace and the learning and development field? This short article will summarize six key trends to watch.

Trend 1: More Workers Will Move From Low to High Wage Countries

While many companies have made the shift to multinational to gain the advantages of global reach and different labor market costs in various countries, so too will talent and workers become more mobile. They will gravitate toward places that pay more. One result: retention will remain an important topic for employers everywhere—but particularly in nations where average wages are lower.

Trend 2: More Work Will Be Done Virtually

The Web makes it possible to do work in one place and send it someplace else. At first that led to offshoring of lower-skill work. But, more recently and continuing into the future, high skilled work will become virtually enabled. Workers and work will be freed of constraints of place and time. A result: everyone needs to work virtually 365 days per year, 24 hours per day!

Trend 3: The Global Population and Workforce Is Getting Older

As a direct consequence of declining birth rates worldwide and increasing longevity in developed nations, the world's population is getting older. In the future, fewer young people will be available to fill entry-level positions. And older people will remain in the workforce or need to work as a direct result of the high costs of health care and longer lives.

One result is that more attention will need to be paid to attracting, developing, and retaining older workers than ever before. Forward-thinking leaders will realize that the workforce of the future will be comprised of higher percentages of older people. That will challenge the traditional stereotype that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." The fact is that, based on research evidence, older workers are just as capable as young ones to master new skills. However, they are simply more cautious in doing so and are less willing to appear foolish if they do not do things right the first time.

Trend 4: More E-Based Solutions Will Be Available to Support the Way Work Is Done

Thousands of "apps" are available on the Ipad. Many of them are relevant to improving worker productivity. That trend will continue. When e-based solutions do not exist, they will be invented. One result: workers will expect employers to provide e-based support to free them from routine tasks.

Trend 5: The Learning and Development Will Become More Professionalized Globally—and Certifications Will Be More Specialized

Already ASTD has its CPLP. Other professional associations, in the US and elsewhere, have developed certifications that are more focused on work results than are traditional degrees. This trend will continue. Work will become more specialized. And certifications will be developed to match that so that employers will be more readily able to tell who knows what.

Trend 6: Performance Is Becoming a Term with Many Meanings, Not Just One

Performance used to mean results. Then employers realized that how people get results was important, and so observable behaviors were added to the common understanding of performance.

Company performance used to mean profits. But then the Balanced Scorecard demonstrated that leaders must think beyond simplistic approaches and realize that performance can be financial success, customer satisfaction and market penetration, efficient business processes and long-term learning and growth.

In recent years, and as a direct result of scandals such as those afflicting Enron and Wall Street, employers have also started to consider ethics (right and wrong) and values (good and bad business practices) as part of a performance.

Consequently, the common understanding of “the bottom line” has demonstrated that there are actually many bottom lines and not just one.

Helping to Prepare Your Organization for the Trends

Consider the following questions:

- What trends over the next 10 years do you foresee in work, the workforce and in the learning and development field in this region?
- What will be the consequences or impacts of those trends?
- What should your organizations do about those trends?
- What should learning and development professionals do about those trends?

By reflecting on these questions and your answers, you and other learning and development practitioners will be better positioned to help your organizations avert the challenges of the future.

Biosketch of the Author

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