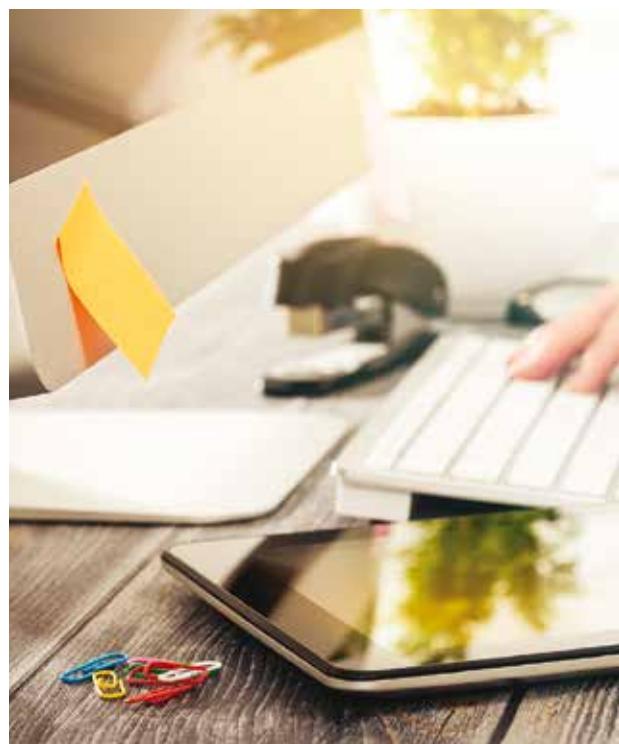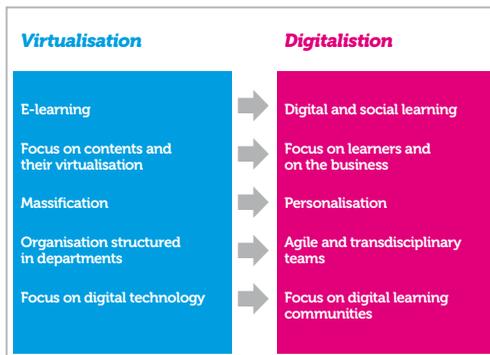# Why Digital Age Learning is important
Nigel Paine

In the current *Global Human Capital Trends* report, which Deloitte has produced for the last five years, the focus has exclusively turned to "rewriting the rules for the digital age". In the Preface, the authors defend this focus by claiming that "in an age of disruption business and HR leaders are being pressed to rewrite the rules for how they organise, recruit, develop, manage and engage the 21st-century workforce".

The point is to illustrate that the curve of technological disruption and change is far steeper than business productivity and that gap is the opportunity to improve performance. So digital age learning is both a reflection of technological change and opportunity, as well as a response to the wider changes in organisations and in society.

Digital age learning is not a fad or a fashion but a critical shift in the demands made on employees as they grapple with fundamental changes in where and how they work and even what constitutes work.

Meanwhile, organisations have to be ever vigilant because the ability of outside organisations to fundamentally disrupt what they do is always present. This is why the Capgemini distinction between merely translating learning into a digital format and transforming learning using technologies to re-assess the purpose, function and outcomes of learning is such an important fundamental shift that every learning organisation should be undertaking. This, as the Deloitte report so aptly says, is a "new game, new rules".

In a recent presentation the CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, said that companies succeeding in digital transformation are doing four things:

Virtualisation		*Digitalistion*
E-learning	→	Digital and social learning
Focus on contents and their virtualisation	→	Focus on learners and on the business
Massification	→	Personalisation
Organisation structured in departments	→	Agile and transdisciplinary teams
Focus on digital technology	→	Focus on digital learning communities

- Becoming more engaged with customers
- Empowering their employees
- Optimising how they run their business operations
- Transforming the products and services they offer using digital content

It is almost inconceivable that any of those shifts are possible without the profound engagement of the staff concerned and the ability to relearn and reposition what they do. But to accomplish those four transformations requires a complete rethink of what learning is and how it should be delivered. The old model is too clumsy and slow to deliver results and too top down in the learning models that are being used.

You could say, imitating Nadella, that those involved in learning have to become much more engaged with the staff they serve, develop new ways of empowering their employees to work it out themselves, to optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning organisation and then transform those services they offer using digital content and digital processes. It is hard to see how you can separate the transformation of organisations from the necessary transformation of learning. And you could probably argue that the former is impossible without the latter.

A recent EFMD special interest group report on transparent and adaptive tolerant markets was called "When work is no longer work". In some ways, the special interest group on digital age learning could have been named: "when learning is no longer learning". Digital age learning signifies the almost complete merger of learning and work: work is learning and learning is work.

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Nick Van Dam, the chief learning officer at McKinsey, recently gave his inaugural professorial lecture at Nyenrode Business Universiteit in the Netherlands. He chose to call his lecture, "Learn or Lose". He termed this a "call to action" to help organisations deal with the "sweeping, rapid changes" that they face. This is as much a responsibility of the individual to embrace lifelong learning as it is of the organisation, which has a responsibility to upskill people and nurture new leaders.

Van Dam suggests that this incorporates two separate but related processes: the first is to enhance the strategic role of L&D, the second is to implement 21st-century L&D practices. At the core of this is innovation. Innovating learning and helping people innovate inside their organisations so that they can move fast and be comfortable working with uncertainty and complexity are at the heart of the changes.

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