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:
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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.