



## Learning Now for the Future

### Overview

The way that we learn and absorb information is evolving. Many organisations continue to provide learning and development to their employees in a traditional, outdated fashion. The challenge organisations face in changing their employee development methods will continue to grow as new generations of digital natives enter the workplace.

To address this, the team at The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) combined their occupational psychology expertise with practical and strategic organisational understanding to create a Learning Strategy that would meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's learners. They created highly engaging and easy to access learning to help prepare their workforce for the future.

### Challenge

Like many organisations, RBS (the Bank) operates in a world where technology is developing exponentially and, with that, the demands of customers are constantly changing. This has implications for the Bank as an employer. It was reasonable to predict that there would be new roles required within the Bank in five years' time, that did not exist yet. Hence the business needed to start preparing their workforce. They aimed to do this by building capability in a strategic way.

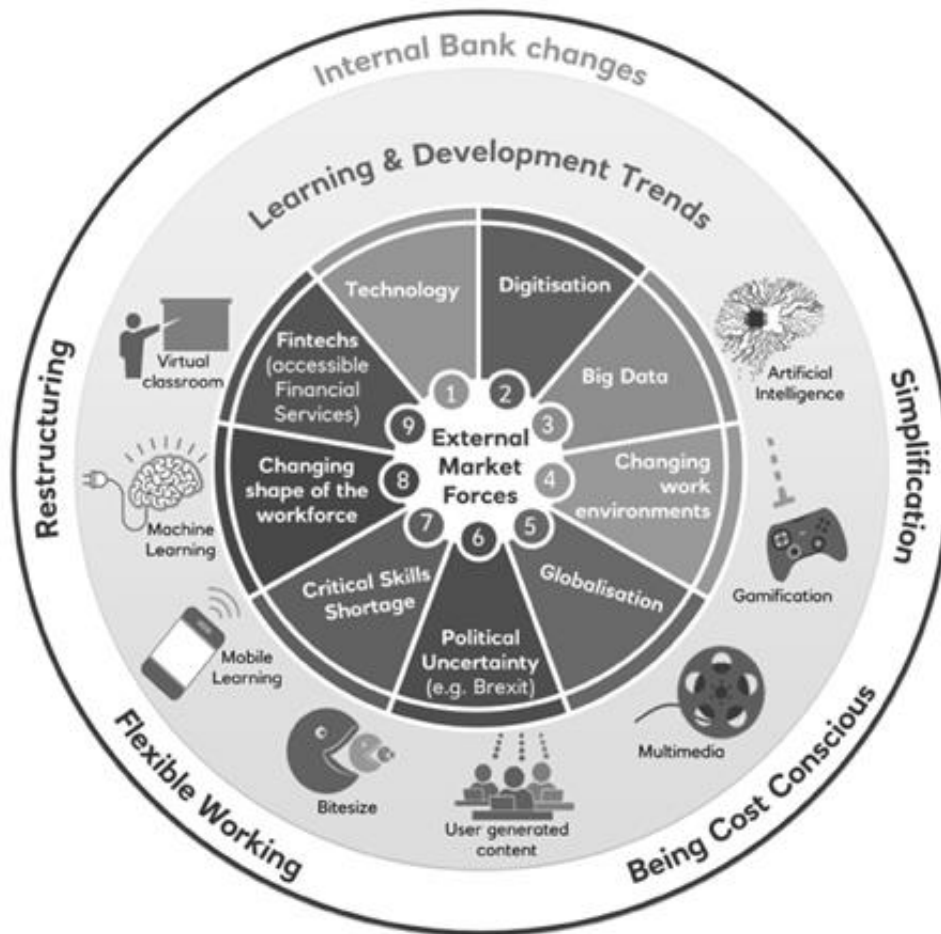


Fig. 1 – Learning and Development Trends in the Bank’s context

The Bank’s approach to learning in the past was complex and disjointed. To address their requirements, they decided to produce a bank-wide learning strategy, uniting their separate learning teams (central, specialist and technical academies). Collectively they would target the most appropriate audiences, engage them in the most appropriate interventions, utilising the most innovative channels. This would require consultation and collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders to break down silos and create a single approach for the whole organisation.

## Approach

The Bank’s learning strategy set out what the organisation needed to do to offer best in class learning. It set the vision for what ‘learning’ needed to become. It set the priorities they needed to focus on to help their employees, whilst ensuring that they would meet their long-term ambition. It required them to take an innovative look at not just ‘how’ they encouraged people to learn – making the most of emerging technologies, such as virtual classrooms and consumer-created content – but also prioritise ‘what’ (skills) they would encourage people to develop. Skills priorities were based on anticipated skills shortages in the marketplace, such as critical and creative thinking.

The learning strategy drew on extensive research in learning and training and also ‘future of work’ trends.

## Business Psychology Referenced

- Social Learning theory, which addressed learning processes applicable to natural settings. Critiquing behavioural theory, Albert Bandura observed "the importance of social agents as a source of patterns of behaviour," which he believed had been ignored. His research offered Social Learning theory, emphasizing imitative behaviour (Bandura, 1962)
- Learning Agility theory, which Kenneth De Meuse and colleagues expounded, was intended to address the demands of dynamic, complex, and uncertain business environments. They suggested that leadership skills were subject to continual obsolescence and displacement. To be effective, leaders would need to demonstrate flexibility and agility to adapt their behaviours as situations changed (De Meuse, Dai & Hallenbeck, 2010, and De Meuse, 2016)

In this theory, the willingness and capability to learn from experience and subsequently to apply that learning to perform successfully, under new or first-time conditions, becomes one of the most critical success factors for Managers and Executives

- Andragogy (the method and practice of teaching adult learners) developed by Malcolm Knowles, which suggested four principles in an approach to adult learning:
  - Adults learn better from experience (even if they make mistakes)
  - Adults favour a pragmatic approach and must be able to apply learning to solve a specific problem
  - Adults are most interested in learning things that have immediate relevance
  - Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction

(Knowles, 1980)

- The comprehensive literature review titled, "Characteristics and Behaviours of Innovative People in Organisations." This paper was prepared for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) by Professor Fiona Patterson, Dr. Máire Kerrin and Geraldine Gatto-Roissard at City University London in 2009
- An integrative model of e-learning use proposed by Kenneth Brown and colleagues. Drawing on a validated theory of behaviour change (the Transtheoretical Model of Change), as well as theories on technology acceptance and employee development, this paper offered an integrative model of factors that influence employee use of e-learning

It considered how technology could practically advance learning, for example using automation to launch individualized interventions that alter motivation and increase usage, based on the individual learner's stage in change (Brown & Charlier, 2013)

- Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which addressed motivation in the learning experience. In SCT self-efficacy was positioned as an especially critical influence on motivation, affecting task choices, effort, persistence, and achievement. Albert Bandura theorised individuals use various processes to develop a sense of agency in their lives. Key motivational processes are aligned to these. When applied to learning, individuals' perception of progress towards a goal may sustain self-efficacy and motivation. Individuals initially acted according to their own values, however comparisons with others provided further information on their learning and goal attainment (Schunk & Usher, 2012)

## Commentaries Considered

Industry experts' perspectives were considered to better understand the impact of the increasing use of technology and workplace trends, the "new world of work and workers." These included:

- Capitalising on Capabilities. Harvard Business Review, Smallwood & Ulrich, 2004
- Creating Enterprise Leaders Research Study. CEB, 2015
- Driving the New Learning Organisation: How to unlock the potential of L&D. Towards Maturity in conjunction with CIPD, Daly & Overton, 2017
- Global Human Capital Trends 2016: The new organisation: Different by design. Deloitte, 2016
- Is the gig economy a fleeting fad, or an enduring legacy? EY, 2016
- Learner engagement: A new perspective for enhancing our understanding of learner motivation and workplace learning. Academy of Management Annals, 4 (1) 279-315, Noe, Tews & McConnell Dachner, 2010
- Robotics and artificial intelligence, Fifth Report of Session 2016-17. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2016
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution. World Economic Forum, Schwab, 2016

## Additional Data Sources Considered

They used a combination of data-gathering approaches for this work that brought in outside thinking and viewpoints, including:

- Using organisational data and experiences
- Using the experiences of others in their sector
- Engaging with their senior stakeholders
- Using future scenarios to test proposals
- Working with a broad spectrum of partners
- Frequently exploring and testing the problem statements

## Big Picture Thinking

The Bank's learning strategy looked ahead to 2025 and beyond to identify the skills and capabilities that would be needed by their employees in the future, so they could ensure they were developing people for careers both inside and outside the Bank. For the first time, the Bank's learning strategy was not focused on the need to build a long career within a single organisation. It would support individuals to build a strong curriculum vitae, which could be used in the future in the wider world of work. This goal resonated with predictions about the future prevalence of 'gig workers' in a gig economy (characterised by flexible, temporary, or freelance jobs).

In creating the strategy, the team had to balance evolution and revolution: which current learning strategies in the Bank to improve, which to scrap, and what needed to start from scratch. This involved building on learning from the past, but also understanding where more radical action was required. For example, defining new priority areas, or turning off existing learning content. Whilst they were not starting with a blank piece of paper the team's analysis made it clear that, to achieve their end goal, revolution was required. This required

a cultural and mind-set shift not only from their learners but also everyone that worked within Learning and Development (L&D).

They began by identifying which skills and capabilities would enable their people to be successful in the future. This incorporated all aspects typically included in models of high performance, including abilities, traits and learning agility (DeMeuse, 2016). To identify both current and future critical organisational capabilities that would differentiate them in the market, they considered what employee capabilities would be needed for the next two years, as well as what capabilities may be needed in the more distant future.

The team was already aware that they would need a workforce with strong digital skills. Digital skills were partly about adapting and contributing to new technology to help them anticipate customer needs. But they also required being able to thrive in a digital environment; being able to adapt to future ways of working that would be more flexible, agile, could include collaboration across different teams and functions, and would require innovation and an enterprising mindset.

## Creative Thinking

The team's creative strategy was the 'Double Diamond' approach, diverging and converging in four stages:

- Diverge to discover the problem
- Converge with insights, ideas and data to define the aim
- Diverge to finding potential strategic solutions
- Converge to deliver the best solutions, testing them with internal stakeholders and external partners

Through their research they reviewed what changes were needed to their current learning strategy, introducing new innovations and retiring ineffective methods.

They wanted to effectively use the 70/20/10 model of learning (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996) by aligning their new Learning Strategy with the natural way people already learn within organisations. The formula proposes that on average, 70% of a person's learning at work is internal and experience-based, 20% comes from interacting with fellow employees and 10% is the result of formal training and reading. They believed, if they encouraged self-directed learning, they could harness and manage the 70% of employees' learning that was often incidental and without direction, as well as designing powerful techniques for the more accessible 30% of traditional learning.

*Note from the Editor: although widely referenced, the 70/20/10 model by Lombardo & Eichinger (1996) is often applied beyond the frame of the original study. Experts suggest the precision of the model should not be generalised to all organisational contexts. (Thalheimer, 2006. Kajewski & Masden, 2012. Clardy, 2018.)*

To help the central, specialist and technical academies' learning teams to implement the revitalised learning strategy, they identified five priorities covering:

- Repositioning learning as a continuous and self-directed activity
- The capabilities they believed would be critical for future success
- Priority groups for development; leaders and 'talent' populations
- A Programme for simplification, making space for new innovations in learning delivery
- Continued focus on customer service

They created short videos to help shift mindsets within the L&D function, which covered changes in learning preferences.

## Outcome

The benefits of the learning overhaul could be seen in the following measures:

- In the first quarter, 62% more unique users used e-learning content, compared with the same quarter in the previous year
- Over £1million in savings was achieved from no longer employing external learning providers
- Estimated savings of £2,017,260 were achieved by providing access to 'Just in Time' personal development via learning apps; users could access learning straightaway and at the point of need (Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003)

The Director of L&D at RBS observed, "This is the most comprehensive blueprint we've had for learning in 20 years, uniting learning teams to work towards a shared direction."

As a result of their new streamlined learning strategy, and their five learning priorities, the organisation had:

- Curated relevant content using different channels for easy access
- Increased their bitesize learning offering
- Deployed mobile learning apps, allowing them to reposition learning at pace
- Run roadshows helping people understand where learning was going and the value of learning
- Transformed their Group Policy Learning, making it more interactive and including features such as gamification
- Introduced learner journey mapping to simplifying processes as much as possible and ensure great learner experiences
- Invested in long-term learning technology with innovative approaches such as artificial intelligence, virtual classrooms and opportunities for integration with a cloud-based learning platform

The above focused on the 'how' of learning, but the Bank's learning strategy also enabled progress in the 'what' of learning, called out earlier.

By identifying the capabilities that would enable their people to be successful in the future, they were able to embed them throughout the employee lifecycle. This was not only in the development space but more far-reaching (for example, areas of HR such as recruitment), ensuring that new employees had the capabilities required for the long-term. Additional areas of impact included the Bank's Behavioural Framework and their Strategic Workforce Planning. This progress showed how the innovative approach taken within the Learning Strategy would continue to have a long-term impact, not only in L&D but across HR and the wider organisation.

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