Trends in learning delivery and design

The Open University

How we live, interact and learn is changing, with a technology-enabled world leading to new directions and possibilities for learning and development within organisations. These opportunities not only impact on the ways people are learning and engaging with education, but also on how learning can be designed and delivered to make it even more effective, efficient and responsive to changing needs.

The Open University's (OU) Institute of Educational Technology is at the forefront of identifying and developing new ways to use technology to learn. Each year, we capture the new trends and opportunities in the learning world.

The following pages highlight some of the key trends and insights we are seeing and expect to develop over the next year and beyond.

Online social learning

Since 2012, labelled "the year of the MOOC" by the New York Times, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have been making headlines. The focus now is not on the phenomenon of free courses, but on how they are starting to transform education by offering 'nanodegrees' that teach the minimum skills needed to enter a new career, or by providing complete degree courses constructed from open access materials.

MOOCs not only deliver education, they are a giant laboratory for testing new methods of teaching, learning and assessment. Analysis of the ways in which many thousands of people are learning online are already starting to influence the design of courses in universities and workplaces.

A central theme of massive-scale courses is 'personalisation'. The idea is that each learner can be given the power to choose when, where and how to study, and that the teaching adapts to the learner, either by providing education that is matched to a person's approach to learning, or by offering supplementary teaching.

MOOCs have enriched learners' experiences, enabling education to be delivered at scale, with learners able to access, engage and learn with a huge global community. MOOCs can be designed to exploit the 'network effect', which means the value of a networked experience increases as more people make use of it. The UK's platform, **FutureLearn**, has been designed around learning as a conversation, harnessing the power of social networks for learning and alone has had in excess of one million registrations since it launched two years ago. More MOOC platforms could be optimised to deliver this effective networked experience.

We have seen MOOCs evolve from loose online networks that required learners to know how to navigate the web and where to engage with their peers, to more structured courses delivered by universities and specialist organisations. But there is still a way to go.

Challenges exist because users only meet online and generally for a short time, and the scale of conversation can mean an overwhelming overload for users not online frequently. Solutions to these challenges centre around linking conversations with specific pieces of learning content, creating short conversations with people who are currently online, and enabling users to review each other's assignments.

We also expect to see social media trends impact on MOOCs, for example building links between community members by following other learners, rating discussion comments and competing with others to answer quizzes and take on learning challenges.

What does it mean for workplace L&D?

MOOCs and corporate academies are often woven into learning strategies as a responsive and flexible learning solution.

TIP

Assess the skill levels of your L&D team. If you think MOOCs could form part of your strategy, it is worth considering the online capabilities required. 2015 CIPD research shows that 96% of L&D professionals see supporting learners online as important, but just 36% have the capabilities to offer these services.

MOOC providers include the UK's FutureLearn (**www.futurelearn.com**) and the US platform Coursera (**www.coursera.org**). Both contain a wide range of free MOOCs suitable for organisational and staff development, and can be used as a low-cost way to engage staff in learning and / or to test commitment for larger programmes of learning.

You may find it useful also to curate MOOCs and other free learning content to deliver a suite of courses to staff, and build in a system of recognition for staff that complete such courses.

Learning to learn

Every day we develop new knowledge and skills, often without even realising, but often we are learning what others want to teach us. Encouraging learners to manage their own learning enables them to identify their own goals and tailor their own learning – not only digesting what others want to teach, but having the confidence and ability to undertake self-determined learning.

Achieving a culture of learning means enabling staff to go back to basics and learning how to learn. One of the most effective and long-term approaches is called 'double loop learning' – double-loop learners not only learn, explore and work out how to solve a problem, but they reflect on the process and consider how to become more effective.

Using the OU as an example, double-loop learning is embedded across courses, and includes encouraging students to determine their objectives and goals, learn, put their learning into practice, reflect on whether how the learning impacted and if the course of action and outcomes were in line with their goals, and then look again at what could have been done differently for implementation in the future. ePortfolios are a good way to capture this.

Double-loop learning is also embedded at an institutional level, using analytics and course feedback to evolve and improve course design year on year.

This type of learning is an approach that can work across any subject and profession and captures the increasingly popular "mindfulness" approaches to personal and professional development, which see individuals encouraged to become more self-aware of their own behaviours, needs and learnings. Encouraging learners to share their knowledge and insights with colleagues can also serve to not only reinforce their learning, but inspire and engage those around them.

What does it mean for workplace L&D?

Engaging staff in learning can be challenging, but learning to learn and particularly double-loop learning can drive and increase not only engagement in learning but also the sharing of knowledge across organisations.

TIP

Encourage staff to take control of their own learning. Ask them to review their current position and future goals, develop objectives based on these and identify learning that will meet these goals.

In both learning and everyday work, encouraging staff to look back at particular challenges, how they overcame these (by deploying new learning or their own knowledge) and what they could do next time, will help to cement existing learning and foster new learning. Organisations are increasingly finding value in staff sharing these experiences with other staff, widening the impact of learning investment and staff experience. You may, for example, also find value in awarding particular staff "champion" status on specific areas of expertise and learning. This develops status and makes learning appealing and, again, increases the impact across organisations.

Maximising engagement through storytelling

As people, we respond best to a learning structure that can be personalised and helps us to embed and revisit our understanding. Stories and case studies provide this. However, learning content often focuses on mastery of facts and figures rather than a narrative.

Narrative in learning broadly consists of structuring a series of events from a particular point of view to create a meaningful whole – writing up an experiment, reporting on an inquiry, analysing a period in history are all examples of this.

The importance of a narrative to deliver structured, memorable learning is even more important in an online world where resources are constantly growing and are scattered across multiple sources and mediums. We expect to see this trend increase in prevalence over the coming years. A good example of this in action is the **Introduction to Cyber Security MOOC** on Futurelearn, with leading technologist Cory Doctorow acting as a guide through the course drawing on his own experiences, successes, mistakes and how he has learnt from these.

This first-hand experience makes for a powerful learning experience, bringing in real-life alongside theory.

Here at the OU, we are also increasingly looking at using serialisation in learning to create drama and maintain engagement. Take, for example, the "duff duffs" at the end of British television soap opera, Eastenders, signaling a climax or cliffhanger at the end of an episode; this same principle can be applied to blocks of learning.

Studying a course in small chunks of a few hours here and there is enhanced and retention increased by ending those chunks with a climax or drama that teases people enough about what is coming up to engage them in the next piece of learning.

Examples include the OU's **Forensic Psychology: Witness Investigation**, which runs like a crime drama in the format of a crime investigation. Learners have to wait until the following week and are fed nuggets of information and clues through social media in the meantime. This gets them talking within the learning community and keeps interest for the next week's learning high.

What does it mean for workplace L&D?

Storytelling is a tool that can be tailored by organisations to deliver learning that fits needs and maximises engagement and, therefore, impact.

TIP

L&D teams can work independently or with learning providers to commission, develop, repurpose or curate learning content in a way that delivers story-led courses and materials tailored to the needs of organisations.

Using learning analytics in course design

Learning analytics enable education and training providers to respond to how people are learning, where they are succeeding, stumbling or falling, to develop courses and support that enhance the student experience and maximise successful learning outcomes.

Traditional education has relied on human monitoring of student progress, outcomes and feedback. Online learning has opened doors to so much more, giving us - as learning providers - access to seeing how students engage with their materials and learning environments, precisely where they may be successful or challenged, and predict future student performance and behaviour, meaning benefits not only for teachers and administrators, but also direct benefits to students. Using this insight in course design makes for a powerful tool in placing the learner experience at the centre of course design.

When used by organisations, learning analytics for course and L&D programme design can be seen as a form of double-loop learning, referred to in the Learning to Learn section in Trends in Learning Delivery and Design. In effect, the single-loop is the approach to learning, and double-loop the use of analytics to reflect on and enhance teaching and learning effectiveness of courses.

Learning analytics will continue to grow. As an example, at the OU we gather a range of analytics from learning data on how students are progressing, to monitoring engagement in online communities and activities. This provides us with an indication of students' commitment and potential success, and we can combine it with back-to-basics insight from student and tutor feedback.

What does it mean for workplace L&D?

We expect organisations to increasingly use and / or demand learning analytics in learning design, as more data is gathered about learners and their behaviours. You are probably already using analytics in your learning provision, starting with the basics such as numbers studying, completion rates, and perhaps staff feedback.

TIP

Through online learning, you can monitor even more detailed analytics to assess commitment to – and engagement in – learning. For example, understanding the number of times and for how long staff log in to their online learning, whether they engage with online materials, surveys etc, individual test results, particular areas of skills and so on.

As well as enabling you to identify particular behaviours and strengths, you will be able to see areas of high engagement, low engagement, drop-off points and hurdles, and even tie in these results to annual staff assessments, goal creation and reward and recognition, as well as embedding such analytics into future learning design.

Bring your own devices

While sometimes a distraction within the classroom, encouraging use of mobile devices within a learning environment can produce significant benefits.

When learners bring their mobile devices into the classroom, they bring with them huge potential to enhance theirs and others' experience.

In effect, learners come equipped not only with individual technologies that they maintain and improve, but also their personal learning environments and social networks. Tutors shift from being providers of knowledge and resources, to acting as directors of technology-enabled networked learners. Learners' personal collections and networks connect learning inside and outside the classroom, and become resources for the classroom.

This kind of technology use changes the relationship with the tutor, who becomes a facilitator, encouraging learners to reach out to their networks and online resources to research, ask questions and gather insights, and manage the sharing and use of this within the classroom.

Contact the OU

The OU offers both off-the-shelf and tailored learning solutions to suit organisational needs. Learning content is designed to have positive impacts for organisations and modules can be hand-picked to create a flexible learning pathway that benefits the individual as much as the business, through the option to lead to accreditation.

If you would like to find out more about how The Open University can work with you, call **+44 (0)300 303 0122** or email **do-business@open.ac.uk** to talk to a member of the account management team.

What does it mean for workplace L&D?

Staff are increasingly supplied with their own technology, such as tablets and phones, for work. These tools can be further deployed into the learning environment.

TIP

Encourage staff to use their mobile devices within both learning and workplace environments to research and solve problems, and to share such knowledge. Online communities developed within organisations can aid such sharing of knowledge, for example private LinkedIn groups or purpose-built community tools such as Yammer, through which staff can share queries, insight and solve problems.

Learning through events

Event-based learning delivered in compact events over a few hours or days creates engaging and exciting opportunities for communities of people gather to solve problems.

Event-based learning is not new, but technology has meant this kind of learning is not simply confined to those physically in attendance, but can be successfully extended to virtually bring together participants from around the world, enriching the learning and event potential.

Examples of community events include:

- **Hackathons** – groups of computer programmers and experts in their fields gather to collectively solve a problem
- **Citizen science** – where everyday people contribute to national and global science observation projects, for example Springwatch

Events give learners focus and something to reflect on afterwards, and can be applied within almost any setting. People are able to learn from each other, through interactions, online research, etc.

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What does it mean for workplace L&D?

Event-based learning has huge potential for organisations and, in many cases, is already being deployed.

TIP
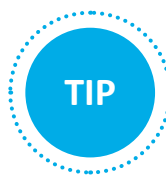
Enable managers to make time for event-based learning, for example half days to bring staff together to consider and solve a real or realistic problem. This can also be built into away days. Such days do not need to be confined to staff; by combining the mobile device tips above, you can open up the experience to external online audiences by allowing staff to use their own social networks and online research skills to feed into your event problem-solving. This enriches the experience of staff and opens up the possibilities of external knowledge informing your organisation's and staff practice.

Dynamic assessment

Everyone's learning potential and strategy is different. The principle of dynamic assessment is that it is important to assess students' potential to learn rather than simply measure what they have just done.

Dynamic assessment is undertaken by an in-house or external assessor to identify any barriers to studying and to apply an appropriate strategy to overcome the difficulties. Such strategies can be measured and responded to by looking at the effect of an intervention on a learner's performance, and can be carried out by a human or a computer-based tutoring programme.

Dynamic assessment is a two-way system, not only helping learners but also informing organisations about topics and skills that many learners are finding difficult. It can be used to complement learning analytics in increasing the understanding of learner behaviour and in informing future course design.

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What does it mean for workplace L&D?

Maximising student success and experience is an important part of delivering effective L&D programmes that engage staff and deliver a return on investment for organisations.

TIP

Embed dynamic assessment into your L&D programme design. This can be done by engaging with learners prior to embarking on courses to identify any barriers they have, this can be around learning capabilities or barriers such as time, confidence etc. The next step is to plan an intervention that will counter any barriers, for example if ability is an issue addressing this through additional learning, or if time is a challenge, working with learners to identify a study plan. Learners can then be tested on these areas before they embark on learning and afterwards, to review the impact of the intervention.