

By **ROSHAN THIRAN**

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I was once told by a university professor that, within a few years of graduating, students' qualifications are effectively obsolete. I thought that was quite a bold statement.

In just a few years? Does the world change so quickly? It would seem so.

I'm sure the professor didn't mean to suggest that formal education is rendered pointless after a period of time post-graduation.

Education is arguably the noblest pursuit; it's what gives us understanding and helps us to contribute to society.

Whether it takes place in a prestigious institution or is picked up in bits and pieces along the way, all of us receive some lifelong benefits from it.

### THE PARADOX OF TRADITIONAL LEARNING

If I'm quick to defend traditional education, it's because I believe that we can be too quick to discard the old whenever the new comes along.

When it comes to learning, our rich history of pedagogy has served so many really well, and continues to do so.

I doubt the professor meant to say that traditional learning is completely without value.

Rather, I believe he meant that, due to the speed of changes in the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world and the increasing demands that come with those changes, lifelong learning is now a necessity rather than a luxury if we want to maintain our edge.

This applies to both ourselves and organisations as a whole. Learning can never be outmoded, but the *methods of learning can*.

### GENERATIONS AGO

As recently as the 1980s, it was enough to leave school, gain employment, and be set for life. If you managed to obtain a degree or diploma, you were all the more secure.

A "job for life" was still a thing, and stable businesses could be sure to thrive in a steady and solid economy.

This idyllic scenario was enjoyed by many only 30 years ago – nowadays, it seems like centuries ago.

People born in the 1980s will remember that black-and-white televisions, cassette players, video cassette recorder machines, and just a few channels of entertainment were commonplace.

They'll recall dial-up Internet connection, as well as state-of-the-art mobile phones from which you could call and text people on the go.

Children born today will grow up to wonder how on earth we put up with such "prehistoric" devices.

### SPEED OF EVOLUTION

And that's something that I find both mildly terrifying and immeasurably exciting.

The speed at which our technologies are advancing enables us to do so much more than we ever thought possible.

In particular, digital advancement is changing industries, from education to sportswear (well-known shoe brands now create training shoes via 3D printing!).

While this might carry some moral and ethical questions, there's one thing that's not debatable – the digital landscape is changing the way we learn, forever.

Despite the changes we are witnessing, learning is one area that seems to be moving along at a snail's pace compared to others.

We appear to be so entrenched in conventional ways when it comes to education that I can't help but wonder if this is really serving us or future generations to come.

# HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING IN ORGANISATIONS

## DUE DILIGENCE ON THE PART OF HR LEADERS



### FACE THE 'CRAZY' UNKNOWN

Of course, every generation has its sceptics. When the printing press first allowed books to be mass-produced, many people said that they would ruin people's ability to recall information – why bother to memorise anything when young people can simply look it up in a book? It sounds crazy, doesn't it?

Every age has similar concerns and, 100 years from now, people will probably look back and say: "You know, in the early 21st century, some people thought the Internet was a dangerous and distracting tool – crazy, huh?"

While valid concerns should be addressed (I'm sure the concerns over books were just as valid at that time), we are nevertheless presented with an ultimatum as advances arise: we can either resist and try to cling on to traditional methods, or we can embrace the positive side of new technology and take advantage of the many opportunities it affords us.

After all, technology in itself is neither inherently good nor bad – it's how we use it that determines positive or negative outcomes.

### ELIMINATE 'TIME-WASTING' LEARNING

When it comes to learning, while I strongly respect traditional methods, I genuinely wonder if classroom-style training has had its day, certainly within the context of business training.

As businesses are presented with increasing challenges such as to stave off competitors and retain their top talents, there's a growing need for organisations to find new ways to survive and thrive, and digital learning is a key resource that can help companies succeed in an ever-competitive market.

I've spoken to so many business leaders who have lamented the 'waste of time' they've felt traditional workshops and seminars to be.

**For HR leaders out there, we need to ask ourselves a serious question: What are we doing to truly help our people grow and develop? With organisations facing leadership pipeline crises, and with many employees disengaged from their roles, it's also an urgent question and one that requires honest introspection and proactive measures.**

Employees, they tell me, see these as nothing more than a chance to escape the office for a while, only to wish they were back in the office once they are met with a sub-par learning experience.

I recall one human resources (HR) professional who was asked to attend a customer service training day.

A professional who had been in HR for over 10 years, they found that they were, "being taught how to speak on the phone to people, and engage with others" – a wasted working day that could have been better put to use in the office (not my words).

It's no wonder business leaders and employees alike view learning experiences with dread.

No one likes to passively sit through a one-way communication, where an "expert" tells a room full of people what they probably already know. It wastes everybody's time.

### ENCOURAGE ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Learning should be relevant, valuable, practical and engaging – instead of whiteboards and stale coffee, employees (and their organisations) fare much better from programmes that offer business simulations through game-based learning, for example.

In other words, learning is most effective when it provides an active learn-by-doing approach within situations that people are likely to encounter.

By offering effective learning that provides simulated challenges, people's minds are stretched and critical thinking and collaboration are enhanced, because there's a practical problem to be solved in real time.

When given a set of hypotheticals, the brain much prefers to go for a nap, conserving mental energy for when it actually needs to function optimally.

### BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

For HR leaders out there, we need to ask ourselves a serious question: What are we doing to truly help our people grow and develop?

With organisations facing leadership pipeline crises, and with many employees disengaged from their roles, it's also an urgent question and one that requires honest introspection and proactive measures.

Is our company a learning organisation, or one that simply brings people in and lets them get on with their 9-to-5 jobs?

As HR leaders, we have a duty to help others develop (if I hear one more person say that HR is solely about 'hiring, firing and holidays', I might burst).

We owe it to those people who do their best to help our organisations succeed, to make sure that we are not only giving them the space and time to learn, but also ensuring the learning experience they receive is relevant, engaging and serves a purpose to the highest standard.

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