

imc & The Institute for Learning & Performance Asia Pacific **Connecting Learning and Business Performance**



Introduction



Recently, imc together with ILP Asia Pacific (ILP AP) conducted a forum online to discuss how leading businesses in our region connect their learning journeys to their wider organisational objectives. Five representatives from a diverse group of businesses participated with imc and ILP AP in this highly informative conversation.

The panel consisted of:

Phoebe Tan, Head of Strategy, Growth & Innovation, The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy

Gerry Marcus, Associate Director, Learning & Capability, Colliers

Brad McLean, National Manager, Learning and Development, BlueScope

Jeremy Kurtz, Education And Training Manager NRL (National Rugby League)

Bill Jarrard, COO, Institute for Learning and Performance Asia-Pacific

Daniel Antman, Managing Director, imc

Samantha Mathews, Head of Business Development, imc (Moderator)

What follows is an edited transcript of the discussion forum.



Welcome



Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

Welcome to this imc/ILP AP discussion forum. We're here to discuss how different organisations connect learning with their overall organisational objectives. Over the past two years we have seen changes and adaptations to business processes that haven't been experienced before.

Prior to COVID, we took for granted the way business was done and the tools at our disposal. Then, this was turned on its head. No longer were we engaging with each other and our clients around water coolers, in lunch rooms or at local cafes. Suddenly, we were forced to make radical changes. Some organisations and individuals adapted brilliantly, while others are still finding their feet.

In this forum, we'll explore how different types of organisations are adapting to these changes and connecting learning to their overall organisational objectives. Underlying much of this discussion is the need to build resilience at an organisational level through the development of a positive learning culture. And, how to achieve this when the traditional formats we've relied on for delivering learning and training are no longer available

For many organisations, the core skills and competencies that drive them have dramatically shifted. To accommodate and turn these changes into opportunities, organisations are altering the way that learning and development occurs. Those that can adapt tend to be the most successful.

Learning, for most organisations, can be classified into three main categories – Mandatory Learning, Necessary Learning and Desired Learning. Organisations that view learning only as necessary, from a compliance perspective, miss out on the true purpose and ultimate benefits of learning and development

Let's see what our participants think. We'll start with an introduction from each of them.

**Phoebe Tan***

I am Phoebe Tan, Head of Strategy and Growth at the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. The organisation is 129 years old this year. We have a significant history in supporting mining and resource professionals around the world, primarily in Australia and New Zealand. My role looks after the strategic growth initiatives for the Institute. Three years ago, we launched our first six module online course. It has since snowballed. We now have ten to eleven courses that we run for the mining sector. We plan to double that number in the next twelve months. It's an interesting time for the mining sector. I'm looking forward to hearing other panelists' thoughts on the subject of learning.

**Jeremy Kurtz**

Hi, I'm Jeremy Kurtz. I'm Coach Education Manager at the National Rugby League (NRL). I come from a slightly different standpoint to some of you, in the fact that the NRL has a huge external workforce. We're responsible for the education and development of coaches, referees, umpires, first aid people, the Club President and secretary treasurers etc. These are people who work across various contexts, such as community sport and elite sport. The NRL still implements learning and development and uses learning management systems, however, my role is mainly focused on mainly focused on the stakeholders working outside our building rather than those inside it.

Phoebe Tan

That's very similar to us, Jeremy. I should have mentioned, we represent 13,000 members. So yeah, we're the same. We provide a service externally, rather than to our internal workforce.

Jeremy Kurtz

At the NRL we have 30,000 to 40,000 learners annually, which requires an extended lens. We don't look so much at individualistic training. We take a big picture approach instead, looking at how to get the best outcome en masse.

**Bill Jarrard**

I represent the Institute for Learning and Performance or ILP. I'm their Chief Opportunities Officer. The ILP is a leading association — an institute that looks after the learning and development field. We do a range of things in that area, primarily for our members and our community. Currently, we're expanding into the Asia Pacific region. The ILP is different from the other organisations here, so I'm interested in hearing what they have to say. I'll be able to potentially comment from the industry point of view, because about 80% of our members are independent. The other 20% operate inside organisations like those you are representing today.

**Gerry Marcus**

Hi everyone, I work at an organisation called Colliers. We're a leading diversified professional services and investment management company. Globally, we operate in 68 countries and our teams work collaboratively to provide expert advice to maximise the value of property for real estate occupiers, owners and investors.

I look after learning and capability for a division called Real Estate Management Services where we manage office, industrial and retail assets for clients. We have a small and diverse workforce, operating in a variety of roles, who need to be certified. When I'm not implementing training, I'm trying to improve digital services to ensure our businesses are future-fit.

**Brad McLean**

I'm Brad McLean. I work for BlueScope, which is a steel manufacturing and distribution company based in Australia and with operations globally. I head up the learning and development team for the Australian arm. We have over 6300 employees in Australia. About half of these are operational employees. In my role, I aim to incorporate Our Purpose and our employee experience strategy into everything we do. I'm keen to learn from the other panellists here today. Before assuming the role in L&D, I worked in employee relations. Before that, I worked as an employment lawyer. I appreciate the invitation, Daniel.

**Daniel Antman**

Thank you everybody for joining us. This is the first time imc has initiated an event of this type. As you can probably tell, a couple of people today (Jeremy and Phoebe) represent clients of imc. Brad and Gerry are not clients of the company. The idea behind this mix is to ensure balance and to have Bill provide an industry perspective. Sam will be the moderator today while I sit mostly quietly in the background.

A quick resume from me first though. I'm the managing director at imc here in Australia. I don't come from a learning background. I come from a varied business background, mainly marketing and business development with a global and local experience set. It's been a privilege for me to come into a business like imc. With the challenges we face as a global community at the moment, the concept of learning and how it connects with overall business commercial objectives, is fundamental. Why? Because, learning can't be a tick-box exercise if we want it to have an impact on meeting organisational objectives.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

As stakeholders in the learning and development industry, we all believe learning is important. I might start with you, Brad. I know you've worked on large programs, like the employee experience piece that you were talking about before. And, I think I saw something about an upstander intervention program in my research. What's your experience of making sure that learning is embedded into an organisation's strategy?

Brad McLean

From my perspective, and from BlueScope's perspective, people are our most important asset. Our Bond, which contains our guiding principles, states that, 'Our people are our strength'. Our Purpose is about strengthening our communities for the future, and our communities include our people.

We believe that if we invest in our people, they will be happy, our customers will be happy, and our business will do well – in that order. We also feel that the development part of the employee journey is critical to the employee's overall experience. People need to feel that their company is investing in them and their continued growth. In terms of where things are headed, if you look at predictions on the nature of work and specific job roles, there will continue to be rapid change. This means we owe it to our people to keep upskilling them so that they're prepared for the future as well.



Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

So your view around embedding learning and a value of learning, is that it starts from the very top. Would you say that?

Brad McLean

Absolutely. You can't look at learning and development in isolation. I think that's where I bring a different lens to this area. You've got to consider learning in terms of how your learning and development priorities fit in with your strategy and strategic enablers. For example, as part of BlueScope's strategy, we have underpinning enablers that will ensure our strategy is successful. One of those is the future of leadership. Much of what we do is about investing in and equipping our leaders, and making sure our leaders understand that continuous learning is really important.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

There's lots of nodding in the room so I think you have a bit of support for that view. Jeremy, I'll pass to you now for a different perspective. How do you consider embedding learning into strategy when the people you're tailoring to don't actually work for you?

Jeremy Kurtz

It's pretty interesting. We take a very similar focus to Brad. We treat our workforce as we would our customers. Everything we do is about trying to make our employees' experience as good as it can be – be they a coach, a referee etc. I aim to find the best way of embedding a culture of learning into the NRL. It's one thing to insist that our coaches learn, but if our intentions and the coach's intentions aren't aligned then the process is fruitless.

There's a couple of different approaches we use to train coaches and referees, for instance. Our focus is to really hook them into the learning so that they think, 'This is great, this is going to help'. In the past we've probably just been focused on providing the service.

We've also changed our approach. In the past, we provided a service that was based on compliance, which was the driver. But what we found in the field was that many people already knew what was expected of them. Now, instead of just going through the motions of a training program, we focus on how we can help our learners enjoy the experience and engage with it meaningfully. Because, the happier they are and the more positive the experience, the better the outcome for everyone.



Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

Have you had any stellar pieces of feedback on the shift in thinking around user centricity or learner centricity?

Jeremy Kurtz

I'll give you an example just so it makes more sense. We used to do an entry-level coaching course to coach kids' football teams. In the past, there was a little chunk of e-learning not long before you came face-to-face with the kids on the field. Now, we run the e-learning component earlier in the year before anyone has started coaching for the season.

Feedback on the delivery of previous training was pretty ordinary. Participants felt it was just a tick-a-box exercise. Delivering e-learning at the start of the year gives coaches more time to understand mandatory risk management components, such as child safety processes, before they hit the field. We shifted face-to-face training to almost halfway through the season.

Learning is initially delivered remotely before coaches begin coaching, and face-to-face training is now very much conversation based. The first question we ask learners is, 'What would you like to learn and what are your biggest challenges?' We spend 10-15 minutes exploring these questions. Then we construct a three-hour session off the back of their answers. The outcome of this is that the learner is learning exactly what they need, because the training is relevant to them. As a result, learner feedback has gone from a 6/10 to a consistent 9/10 or higher. From here, we'd like to try and engage them even more.

Adult learners come to training with a lot of pre-existing knowledge. Posing the question, 'What do you want to learn,' disarms them in a positive way. Phoebe, you've got a similar audience, I guess, what are your thoughts?

Phoebe Tan

It's an interesting one. The Institute was actually created under Royal Charter, which means that we were ordained by the Queen of England with a specific purpose to advance the sciences relating to mining and resources.

This means our whole organisational strategy is shaped around how we can raise professional standards within the mining and resources sector. A few years ago, we underwent a very intentional shift in our approach. We now aim to represent all people in mining, not just those working in the traditional disciplines of mining, engineering, geology and metallurgy.

In doing so, we've expanded our suite of products and services. When it comes to conferences, events, and networking opportunities we aim to attract people from various roles within the sector. For example, the finance community is a huge stakeholder group. When it comes to our professional development and training arm, it's the breadth of professionals in the sector that really drives what we provide our members and customers.

We're all about raising the level of professionalism in the industry – about knowing what the hot topics are and what professionals are struggling with. One area is health and safety. Any fatality in a mine site is massive. Health and safety is a vital consideration of all mine sites. Another one is community perception. We've just launched a six module course around environmental and social responsibility.

Many of you would have seen the news earlier this year about the Rio Tinto Juukan Gorge cave explosions. Those kinds of stories don't really help the public's perception of mining. Our role is to equip mining professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to increase best practice and technical standards within the sector. Our courses help these professionals implement behavioural change and cultural change in their workplace, and provide them with practical tools.

Another example is that earlier this year we launched and delivered a course on diversity and inclusion. As you can imagine, mining is a very male dominated industry. D&I is a huge topic, aimed at fostering an environment of diversity. A large part of the course was about providing participants with a checklist, or toolbox, that they could take back to their workplaces to initiate important conversations with their managers, colleagues and teams, in order to challenge the status quo. Similarly to Jeremy, we've tried to stay away from compliance to focus on people being better professionals with an aim to improve the sector overall. That's ultimately our strategy.

Bill Jarrard

I'm really encouraged by what Brad, Jeremy and Phoebe have said. One of the things we've talked to our members about is how to identify the type of learning an organisation requires. For instance, does the learning need to happen in training? Learning can be done in a whole bunch of ways, not just in a training environment.

Organisations leading the way understand this. We're seeing that companies that don't have learning and development as a core principle and are not asking their people how they want to learn, risk losing employees to places more focused on L&D.

The other thing, from a strategy point of view, is that many of our corporate organisations are beginning with the end in mind. They're asking, 'What are the performance outcomes we want to achieve? What are we trying to change here? What behaviours do we want our people to have? And then, how do we actually deliver?' They begin with the end in mind, entering the learning design model as such. In work as a trainer, I always begin with, 'Why do you want to do this training? What is the outcome you're seeking to achieve?' These factors have to be at the core of any learning strategy.

Samantha Matthews (Moderator)

Let's talk a little bit about the culture of learning and address this to Phoebe as head of strategy growth and innovation. In the mining industry, which you said was almost 130 years old, what's your approach to talking to stakeholders and managers about learning culture? Do you think there's an appetite for it and what do you use to make sure that learning is front of mind?

Phoebe Tan

That's an interesting one. I'll look at it from two perspectives – first from an organisational perspective and then in terms of what we're doing with our members and the industry itself.

Despite being a peak professional body, our structured learning and development arm is only three years old. If you consider organisations like CPA Australia and AICD, their flagship product is actually their education.

A lot of membership bodies focus on their conferences or education as core parts of their membership services and offering. It was a logical step, in terms of capitalising or rather leveraging our extensive suite of technical content, to expand into more structured learning opportunities.

We focus entirely on online training because we have a very dispersed group of learners. Many are fly-in fly-out workers or workers on remote sites. A lot of our participants are from overseas as well, because Australian mining is highly regarded around the world. I think a lot of emerging economies, like Latin America, Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, Russia and parts of Asia, look to Australian mining for best practice. We've had the opportunity to examine learning from that perspective while promoting Australian mining best practices and standards.

In terms of your specific question about management and learning, now when we go into companies to talk to their HR managers and L&D departments, we see a link between learning and the company's values.

The culture of lifelong learning supports the overall organisational culture and the values they want to foster within the company. A lot of the conversations we now have with companies are about how we can supplement what they're already doing, rather than telling them what to do as a third-party L&D provider. Bill said it's not just about training, this is true, it's absolutely like the 70-20-10 model of learning and development. The majority of learning is done through your day-to-day role, as opposed to structured learning where you sit down with the purpose of retaining information. These are the kinds of conversations we're having with companies and are the trends we're seeing.

Samantha Matthews (Moderator)

Jeremy, we haven't heard from you and there's a point here around the values of an organisation and whether or not learning is important to them. Can you speak to that?

Jeremy Kurtz

Definitely, but I think it changes depending on the level of the NRL you examine. We have pretty standard values across the organisation that focus on community sport and the bigger experience sport provides. A lot of what drives us is our responsibility as custodians of the game.

We've done a lot of research that shows that if kids have a poor experience with adults in community sport it becomes the primary reason for them to leave it. Conversely, we have research that says that people who have a good experience as youngsters, make up a majority of the 'fanatical' fan base at a later date.

When we look at the whole business, we have to consider our sport is also an entertainment business. For them, it's very much about developing the game; knowing that the more people they have playing, the more talent they'll eventually see at the top level. And, the more people playing at a younger level the better the overall condition of the NRL will be. A positive culture creates more fans, more members, more TV viewers and ultimately the sale of more merchandise.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

Sounds like a very long term strategy to make sure that the person playing the game at a young age stays with it. There's probably a lot of touch points in there to make sure that happens. I like that you sell the game at different levels. Gerry, what's your experience of coming into an organisation and shaking things up a bit.

Gerry Marcus

My learning strategy tends to focus on moving organisations from, 'let's tell Jane Doe and Joe Bloggs how to use Excel' to more of a research focus. I used to work from a vendor perspective in delivering and building eLearning for clients. Then I moved into more transformational projects, which were capability oriented.

In that space, stakeholders asked, 'What do learning and transformation projects have to do with each other?' I had to grapple with that question myself. If you are preparing an organisation to function in a future environment, what skills should they deliver for current and future users within their current environment?

Using a sports analogy, if you're teaching a tennis player how to dribble a basketball and shoot hoops, they'll want to know why they should learn these things? Sometimes, we're not clear on how we're going to use these skills. In reality, you're providing them with the capability they'll need when the basketball court shows up.

When I look for values, I don't necessarily focus on the learning culture or look for evidence of what drives learning, because often values are to do with how we want people to function within an organisation. If we have collaboration and an investment in relationships as organisational values, we may need learning and education to instill and promote them.

At Colliers we've also got a mantra of accelerating people's careers.

Traditionally, learning is a lag indicator, along the lines of, 'We've moved people into management positions and now we should train them on how to be good leaders, right?' Nowadays, it's more like, 'Let's prepare people for a future. Let's prepare the organisation for competitiveness'.

I come from a banking background where they had what I call a healthy sense of paranoia. This led to thinking about, 'How do we function in the future? What does the future look like? And how do we prepare for the future?'

There's a point where what I'm proposing around learning and development sometimes reaches far beyond where the organisation can even see itself. For example the role of digitalisation and the use of automation in our organisation.

I think part of the challenge for learning professionals is to get stakeholders to see the strategic value of learning in the context of the values of the organisation. For many, they might just be thinking, 'Let's grow the business, let's be productive and let's strive for productiveness.' But they can't really see the strategic value of learning, which beckons questions like, 'What will the future of learning look like in our industry based on the capabilities that we have? What about the mix of human and computer resourcing automation? What will the impact be on the types of roles we hire? Will those roles even be around in future? What do multi-generational workforces mean for leadership? And, how do we train people to accommodate that?'

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

Gerry, do you feel like the responsibility for this innovation shift sits on your shoulders? an organisation and shaking things up a bit.

Gerry Marcus

It's interesting when you come from an environment where the approach was, 'Let's get going' from an innovation perspective. Then you go into an organisation which does not necessarily embrace innovation in learning. I try to be strategic. I talk about things like retention or about the need for skills in a particular area of the business that might be mission critical.

Also, things like scalability. For example, how are we going to scale this business? Those kinds of conversations make sense to some business leaders versus others. I've found ways of talking to different stakeholders in senior positions that press their buttons and focus on the drive for a learning and development agenda, and a transformation agenda for the business.



Samantha Matthews (Moderator)

This next section is about the future of work. This is about organisational learning, and helping people deliver on skills that an organisation is going to need in the future. Now that we're talking about what that future could look like, I'd like to start with Bill. What changes do you think organisations need to make to ensure they can deliver learning and development effectively in a long-term, remote world?

Bill Jarrard

It's a really good question and it depends on the kind of business that people are in. As an example, one of our corporate members, PEXA (Property Exchange Australia), has pivoted to full online training. When there was no longer the availability of conveyancers to physically change papers with banks and related entities in South Australia, PEXA had to train every single conveyancer and bank person in a matter of weeks, and also had to pivot to exclusive online training.

We've seen people modify and adapt quickly. I've been saying to a lot of our members that we're in a global environment now more than ever before, which means that we can digitally go almost anywhere in the world, allowing for time differences. While others, from around the world, can come to our markets. If we keep looking at what we used to do and what we used to think about, in terms of where we can actually impact, we'll be missing opportunities. I don't know about some of you, but I may never get on an overseas flight again, or at least not for a while. These are the kind of changes we're looking at.

Samantha Matthews (Moderator)

Do you think, Bill, that speed is important here? I remember when the pandemic first broke, there was a bit of a panic to get things online and operational as quickly as possible. Whereas that urgency has sort of disappeared in the last six months as people search for solutions that are not just quick fixes.

Bill Jarrard

I think what we saw at the beginning of the pandemic was a rush to switch from face-to-face to virtual instructor-led training. Now, the big question is, do we continue with that? What I'm challenging myself and our members to think about is the different ways of offering our services.

Some will get back into the classroom, because in many cases that physical interaction is essential. It's interesting, my wife did a first aid course recently and she couldn't tie bandages on the other participants because of social-distancing rules. But what kind of first aid course is useful when you can't tie a bandage? It's these kinds of things that are going to be interesting as time passes.

While some education will certainly need to go back into the classroom, some will be carried out in a hybrid instructor-led model and some will occur fully online. The question in this case is, do you convert your traditional courses into online material? I was talking to somebody the other day about developing online training. He said, 'I don't know why anybody would hire or pay somebody for sales training given that there's millions of free videos out there by some of the top salespeople in the world.' These scenarios make it really interesting. There is so much material available. And, the amount of free material available is frightening in some ways, but similarly offers us an opportunity to learn and grow.

Gerry Marcus

I've at times heard people say, 'I just want someone to sit with me and show me'. I wonder how much of that is a hangover from our traditional classroom mentality, when someone was telling or lecturing learners. I wonder how much we'll move across to solely digital as we've got more employees growing up in a digital environment, accessing materials on demand and working in that way. I think there's the potential for some resistance to solely digital where people still say, 'I want someone... a real person to sit with me.' We run lots of live sessions via Teams and we still get people asking for that model.

Bill Jarrard

Gerry, is that a generational thing? Do you think that the need for a physical presence is driven by a certain demographic?

Gerry Marcus

Quite possibly. I think people are influenced by their past experiences of what education looks like. Older people didn't grow up on digital learning. They were educated through speaking, being told what to do and being instructed.

Coming back to your point, Bill, regarding that component of competency. When I did a lot of education at TAFE, people would talk about what you can put online but also about what you CAN'T put online. For example, if you're teaching a bricklayer to lay bricks in a line, they need to be physically taught how to lay bricks. You can't ask them to drag little bricks on the computer screen. There's a knowledge component which is conceptual and there's a skills component, like using your hands. The physical skills you can't teach online. Of course, when you're doing computer work and similar tasks, it's a little easier, because you don't have to physically sit next to the learner. You can share screens to demonstrate skills.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

Brad, you've got something to say about employee experience – about the whole journey rather than just these discrete learning events or webinars etc. How do you see viewing the whole employee as being a future-proof way of working, if there is such a thing?

Brad McLean

If you are examining the employee experience, you need to focus on every part of the employee journey, and this isn't limited to someone's time in employment. To look holistically, you need to go right back and examine the process that attracts a person to your organisation in the first place.

What people are looking for these days is a company that invests in their employees and that prioritises continuous learning. It's important at that very first stage, before someone becomes an employee, to be able to show that continuous learning and development are priorities.

Then, as you move through the employee journey, the learner experience is a great way to engage people. You need to ensure that as the person progresses through their employment, they're continuously learning and developing.

Two notable stages in the employee journey are perform and develop. The perform and develop stages of the employee journey need to be constant, otherwise people will stagnate and won't feel invested in. They won't feel they can progress.

At the end of the employee journey, when people leave the organisation, you need to come back to learning opportunities. Sometimes companies will just stop the journey there, but there's a lot more they can do after someone leaves. There's a lot of different data points you can seek that relate to learning.

For example, what do you learn about why the person left? What are you going to do in the future to improve the employee experience for other people? Making sure you keep that person as a contact is also important from a learning perspective. There's a lot of learning you can get from people who may not be part of your organisation anymore, because they've gone to a different industry or a different employer.

Therefore, learning and development is important throughout the entire employee experience journey – not just when someone's in your employment, but before and after they become an employee too.

Gerry Marcus

We ask new employees questions right at the beginning around their recruitment experience, like, 'Do you feel like you belong?' and 'Do you feel comfortable speaking up?' We ask these questions because we want people to fit in. We also ask questions like, 'Do you have the training that you need? Do you understand how your work is going to be measured and evaluated? Do you know what's expected of you in the role? And, is this a good match for you? Do you feel like the role is a good fit?'

As people respond we can see if there are any red flags and we can go back to their manager within the first two or three weeks of their employment and immediately address any problems. We make sure there's proper support with a buddy and their manager, if they need it. This is better than discovering the problem after they've either walked out or left us.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

And it's about employee probation, which from the employee perspective is often, 'Oh, I just have to get through my six months before I'm a full-time employee'. In actual fact, it should be working out whether or not you like the organisation you've signed up for and whether or not they like you. It's a two-way conversation.



Gerry Marcus

Absolutely. A lot of it is about the notion of setting people up for success. Checking in with people along the way is critical and asking them, 'Are you okay? Is this working for you? Is this the role that you thought you signed up for?'

Depending on the response we can go back and actually address issues with recruitment or the careers team. Address where we think something has been missed and respond proactively. The whole notion of knowing who the employee is allows us to build trust, rather than receiving an anonymous response that we can't directly address. In the first instance, a manager can approach the employee and say, 'Hey, we've got some feedback from you. We noticed there's some issues'. We want people to talk to us about their problems. We don't want to discover these things as they're walking out the door.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

It's about fostering a culture of open conversation. With the cost of recruitment, you really want to feel confident about the people you have employed. So, by the time their feet are under a desk, you are confident about keeping them.

Gerry Marcus

When we lose them, the impact of that workload gets spread across other employees. It's critical we do everything we can to keep people and, of course, acquire the right people in the first place.

Jeremy Kurtz

One thing we try to teach coaches as part of the learning process is to use questioning as opposed to just giving direct feedback – it's a much better way to help people learn. The big thing in the coach-player relationship is that if someone doesn't feel safe, they don't feel comfortable. If they don't feel competent, able to act autonomously or able to communicate how they're coping, you're not likely to get a positive response.

In the same vein, we say to coaches, if a player doesn't feel comfortable, safe or able to communicate what they're experiencing, all that player is thinking about is not saying the wrong thing. As a result, the coach won't get a genuine response from the player and the learning doesn't happen.

Our organisation does this process well. We send out surveys to gauge how people are feeling about the relationships they have in their micro-teams and with their manager etc. If the recipients feel safe, you'll receive really genuine feedback. When you don't have a positive culture, real evaluation is much harder. Questioning is a very valuable tool.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

I really resonate with that, because feedback is a gift. For people to give feedback, they need to have valued you enough to think that you're going to take that feedback on board. It's the same when it comes to learning, people won't give you the time of day if they don't feel valued, or if they don't feel like their responses will be taken seriously. Or worse, if they think they'll be punished for being honest.

Jeremy Kurtz

It comes back to intention. If you're a coach with a new group of players whom you want to build a relationship with, you need to be able to ask, 'What do you want to learn? What do you want to get better at? Why are you playing the game? Why are you invested in it?' When you get them to that point, you can be confident that they understand the aim is to help them improve and to allow them to contribute to the process. It's all about establishing a relationship so that learners know we want to help them improve. It completely changes the mindset and subsequent interactions with them. In 99% of cases, this approach has led to players and coaches (both learners) solving problems together and learning from each other.

Daniel Antman

There are obviously some circumstances where a more direct teaching approach is prudent. For example, if you're a pilot, you want to be told, 'You only ever push this button in these circumstances,' as opposed to, 'When would you like me to push this button?' In a corporate environment, that whole coaching-a-child principle carries through to the way that you deal with your teams and your staff, because they need to be comfortable saying, 'I've got ideas. I'd like to be trusted. I'd like to have an open, safe environment where I can say, I'd like to do it this way, as opposed to this way, what do you think?'

Gerry Marcus

Unsurprisingly, the basis of the Patrick Lencioni Model is relevant here. Of the Five Dysfunctions, the first one, trust, is critical. Research shows that trust accommodates healthy conflict. Once you've got healthy conflict, then you can ask for commitment, because everybody has each others' best interests at heart. When you've got commitment, you can hold people to account. When you've got accountability, you can ensure employees are acting in the interest of the team. Absolutely, trust is critical. If people trust each other, then they're going to look out for each others' best interests.

Samantha Mathews (Moderator)

The last questions are, what are the implications if we don't embed learning properly? And, is there anything you can add to the discussion from your own journeys?

Phoebe Tan

We've talked a little about the rapidly changing workplace due to COVID and the concept of future proofing our workforce. One of the courses we're developing at the moment for the mining industry is a data analytics and machine learning course. It's targeted at middle level mining professionals, colloquially known as, 'those who are caught in the world of spreadsheets'.

We had to consider how we transition them from spreadsheets to understanding what's happening in terms of big data. And, how to teach them to use software and tools to make informed business decisions. It's not a complicated course. It examines how to manage the people who work on the tools? How to have effective conversations with these employees? How to know what to ask as a manager or as a leader of the business?

This is one example of a shift in how we deliver learning in a digital environment. This approach also includes the fostering of soft skills, like resilience and accommodating diversity. We consider how day-to-day jobs might be impacted to future proof our workforce. If we don't get this right, we'll start to see a large gap between the employees who are ready for change versus the ones who are being left behind.

Bill Jarrard

Our conversation makes me recall some training I did with Tony Buzan about learning how to learn. We often load people up with information. Think about school. We learnt math and history, but we never learnt how to learn. Skills like reading with purpose and understanding took a back seat to reading quickly.

In Canada, the first university subject I attended was about how to study. I learnt how to speed read, take notes and join study groups, so that I was prepared to learn, going forward. Advanced learning techniques like speed reading, reading with purpose, memory development, note taking and mind mapping were part of that process.

We need to make sure our learners know how to learn. This isn't just about technique, it's about advice too. When I first became a senior manager, I was amazed how much one of my colleagues knew about what was going on in our industry. When I asked him about it, he said, 'I read the newspapers.' After that, I began arriving at work before seven am to read three newspapers before the day started.

Then I realised I really needed to get to know my staff better. I learnt who of my nine managers had families and when each of my managers birthdays were etc. This was part of the learning process of becoming the leader I wanted to be. Learning how to learn, guiding employees and mentoring them is part of the process of learning.

Brad McLean

I'd like to share an adage that I have in my learning and development strategy that's related to this point. The CFO says, 'What happens if we invest in people and they leave?' And then the Chief People Officer replies, 'What if we don't, and they stay?' I think that's a really nice point. What will ultimately happen if we don't invest in learning and development is that we'll not only have an under-skilled workforce, but we'll have an under-engaged workforce as well.

Gerry Marcus

Phoebe made that great point about future proofing people. It's our job as learning professionals to do this. I think we often hear what people are calling for now, while also seeing where they're headed. It's our job to future proof the organisation and that includes getting leadership to think about the things they should consider to ensure this. Yes, we talk about growth. Yes, we talk about scale. Yes, we talk about great things. But, what does it actually look like when we talk about operationalising these elements in the business.

We often encourage leaders to think about what they need to do to create a future that people envisage themselves part of. In my discussions with other learning professionals in the property industry, the conversation has shifted from those with frontline staff and employees to leaders. How are we going to get the leaders to understand us? How are we going to help leaders think about technology, emerging technology, the impact on business and its ability to remain competitive? A lot has shifted to the C-suite and how we help leadership shift their mindset.

Daniel Antman

A question for the group, how engaged are the C-suite? Do they actually get this stuff? My fear is they don't. And, those who don't get it, are putting their businesses at risk. Have any of you seen an organisation in which the executive level is really engaged – in that they've invested not only money but the effort into making it work? If so, have there been measurable results?

Bill Jarrard

One thing I can say, Dan, is that a very good survey was done about a year ago that demonstrated that as a result of COVID there was a significant shift in learning and development going all the way up to the C-suite.

There are some good statistics that reveal this shift in learning is acknowledged in the C-suite too. I think organisations, like the ones here today, see the connection to that level as vital and, as a result, that level is engaging a lot more.

Gerry Marcus

It's critical to have leaders understand the role of learning. They often still see it as a remediation activity or as a lag activity, similar to ensuring professionals are compliant. They see learning as having a menial or operational role to play.

I believe learning has a transformative function too. Our job is to help leaders understand this. A key question in this process is, how do you deal with the existing organisational mindset? This requires leaders to engage with a new paradigm of thinking.

People in learning have to help leaders realise this. There are two big issues. The first is leadership thinking and mindset. The second is resistance to change, which we see often in operational staff. You know, 'Oh we've always done it this way'. Those are the two biggest factors impacting the competitiveness of an organisation.

I mentioned workplace agility and change management. Employees resistant to change get frustrated because they don't understand the concepts, so keep doing things the way they always have.



We thank all the participants for their input into this discussion forum. The profile and importance of L&D is only going to continue to rise as boards, management, employees and other stakeholders understand that quality L&D programs are an essential part of their business and personal growth strategies. imc look forward to hosting more of these forums where we can continue to lead important discussion about how learning is connected to business performance and outcomes. In closing, we'd like to quote Andrea Clarke, author and founder of Digital Learning Business, Future Fit Co. and a well-respected commentator in the learning sector, who recently stated that ***the most important role the CEO will need to fill in 2022 is the Chief Learning Officer.*** That's saying something about the profile and importance of L&D.



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Rewrite the way we learn



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