



# The Empowered Learner

Technology has put instant knowledge and know-how in the hands of the learner, which has changed everything for L&D.



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### Introduction

Workplace learning has changed dramatically in the past ten years and technology has been the primary driver of that change. However, it has not necessarily been learning solutions supplied by organisations that have been the game-changer. The way that technology has enabled workers to self-direct their learning has been the significant factor. Whether it's been fully acknowledged or not, this has dramatically changed the learner's relationship with L&D.

In this White Paper we examine today's Empowered Learner, the modern learning environment, and what this all means for the modern L&D function.

## About this White Paper

By capitalising on recent insights into today's learners - their motivations, habits and preferences - L&D can drive improved business performance through increased learner engagement.

This White Paper reflects and interprets research and insights that have been published by various industry sources and experts in recent years. The commentary is provided by David James, former-Director of Talent Management, Learning & OD at The Walt Disney Company, EMEA.

## Executive summary

Employees today are turning to search engines for information and know-how, often in their moments of need and without them leaving their workflow<sup>1</sup>.

Survey responses are showing that employees are rating internal knowledge-sharing and collaboration<sup>2</sup> as their preferred - and most effective methods of learning - whilst, company training and e-learning is rating as the least<sup>3</sup>.

L&D faces becoming marginalised if it does not understand and capitalise on the motivations, preferences and habits of the modern employee, who is now demanding 'a personalised, digital learning experience'<sup>4</sup>.

L&D needs to take a look outside of the corporate infrastructure and see what can be learnt and adopted to increase learner engagement and develop the capability the organisation requires.

Knowledge sharing 87%

Company Training 37%

Company training is rated the least valuable way to learn in the workplace<sup>3</sup>



91% of smartphone users will turn to their devices for ideas while completing a task<sup>5</sup>

53%

53% of people quickly put into practice their own self-directed learning<sup>6</sup>



Only 25% of companies feel comfortable with today's digital learning environment<sup>7</sup>



# The Empowered Learner

Hyperconnected & self-directed

## Modern online learning habits

Research shows us that employees are accessing the learning they need differently from how they did just a few years ago. Most are now looking for what they need away from their organisation's Learning & Development channels. For example, it's recognised that more than 70% of employees will now use web searches to learn what they need for their jobs and are increasingly turning to their mobile devices to find just-in-time, immediate answers to their unexpected problems<sup>1</sup>.

The way people are interacting with their mobile devices provides further insight into modern habits.



91% of smartphone users will turn to their devices for ideas while completing a task<sup>5</sup>



Searches related to "how to" on YouTube are growing 70% each year<sup>5</sup>



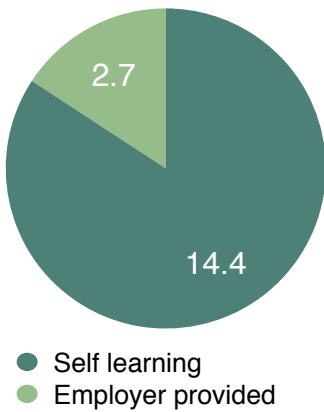
More than 70% of employees use search engines to learn what they need for their jobs; will unlock their smartphones 9 times an hour; and watch videos for no longer than 4 minutes<sup>1</sup>



Employee groups web-searching to learn what they need for their jobs<sup>8</sup>

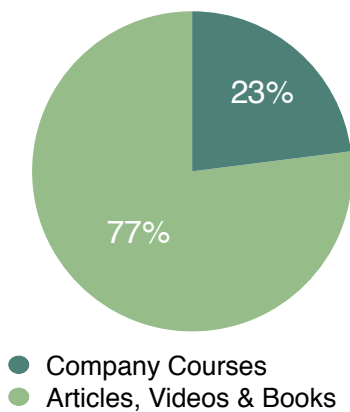
## Employees are learning from more varied sources

Research is showing that employees are developing 'continuous learning' habits whilst drawing from various sources to do so. Furthermore, the involvement of the organisation and L&D is a small proportion of this continuous process as people explore and discover new trusted sources<sup>9</sup>.



Employees spend up to 5x more time learning from their own sources

Workers invest more than 14 hours a month, on average, learning on their own, but just two to three hours on employer-provided training



Employees rely disproportionately on self-direction vs company L&D

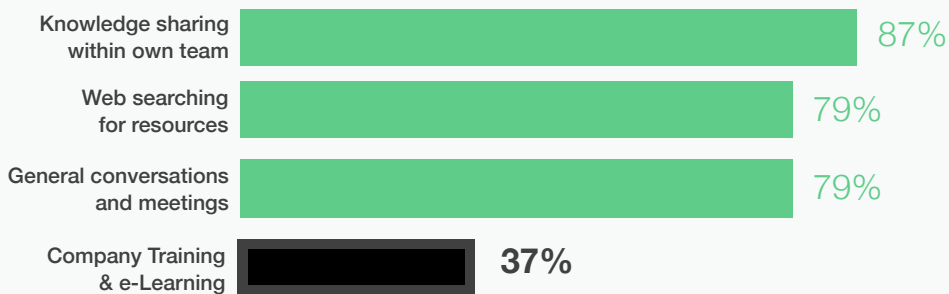
23% of workers say they completed a course of any kind in the last 2 years, whereas more than 70% learned something for their job from an article, video or book in the last 24 hours



## Company training is the lowest rated way to learn

The relationship between L&D and today's Empowered Learners has changed, with direct access to experts, knowledge and learning freely available online. This was seen starkly in a recent survey to rate the importance (value/usefulness) of 10 different ways of learning in the workplace. It was revealed that 'web-searching for resources' came second only to 'knowledge sharing within the team'. 'Company training/E-learning' was rated least important - and ranked 10 out of a possible 10.<sup>3</sup>

### How important (useful or valuable) are the following ways for you to learn in the workplace?<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>In between #3 and #10 included: Personal and Professional Networks & Communities, External Blogs & News Feeds, Content Curated from External Sources, Self-Directed Study Externally, Company Document and Internal Job Aids



# The Modern Learning Environment

From 'push' to 'pull'

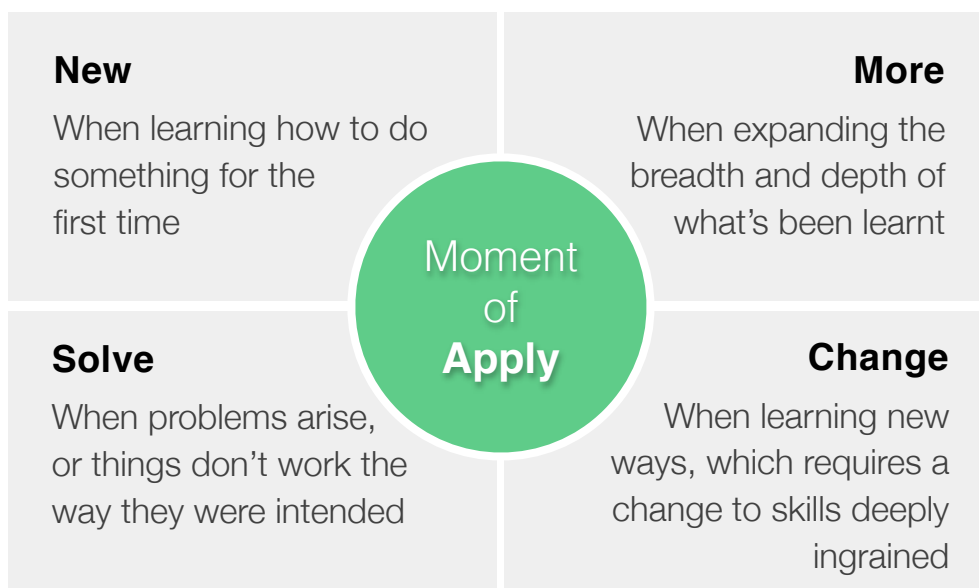
“Being constantly connected has trained us to expect immediacy and relevance in moments of intent - the I-want-to-know, I-want-to-go, I-want-to-do moments.”

*Think With Google, May 2015*

## Traditional L&D is absent at the moment of need

Modern learning habits, facilitated by web-search, have prompted and accelerated the move away from ‘push’ towards ‘pull’ learning. The Empowered Learner will now *search* for what they need, online and at their moment of *need*. Often they’ll search just before their moment of *apply* whilst remaining within their workflow<sup>10</sup>. However, web-searches take employees outside of their organisation where the answers they discover lack the appropriate context. This is despite the *knowledge* and *know-how* often residing within the organisation.

### Employee moments of need<sup>10</sup>



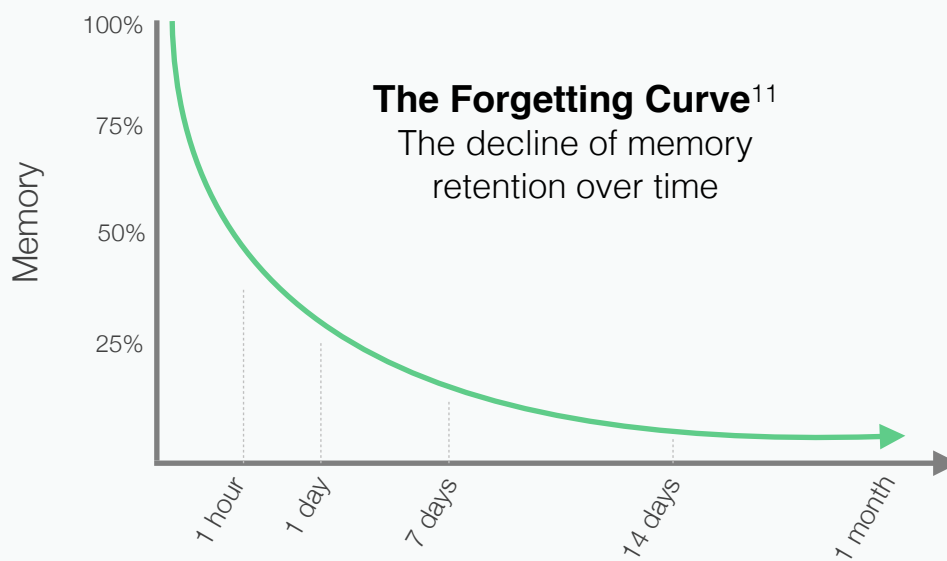
Traditional approaches to training and e-learning require scheduled time for leaving the workflow to *learn*. The application of which will take place at an undetermined time in the future.

Today's world of work often requires people to remain in the workflow and learn something (*New* or *More*) right at the moment they need it - rather than take a ‘course’. Work demands and web-search have determined that people “learn in real-time, whilst on the job, at the moment of apply.”<sup>10</sup>

## 'Pull' increases the influence and retention of learning

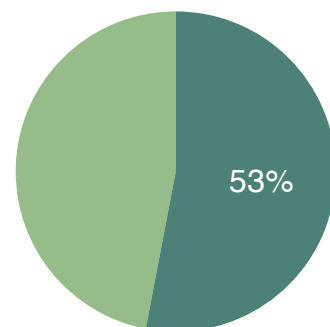
Whilst traditional 'push' learning, in the form of classroom and e-learning courses, often anticipate the moments of need, it may be a number of weeks or months before application. By which time, the opportunity to influence application to any real effect has long gone. In contrast, when The Empowered Learner searches online for information and know-how they bring *motivation* and *immediacy* to the learning, which increases the likelihood of applying that learning and, therefore, its retention.

Learners forget almost everything from 'push' learning unless applied quickly.



**When learning is 'self-directed', the application increases significantly<sup>6</sup>**

53% of people quickly put into practice their own self-directed learning



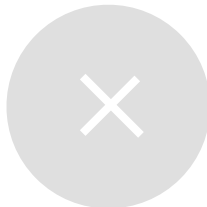
## Between the old-world and the new-world of L&D technology

In many organisations there is a conflict between old-world internal systems and the new-world of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). This new-world brings with it the habits, preferences and motivations of the device owners. So, whilst on one hand employees expect a “personalised, digital learning experience that feels like YouTube”<sup>4</sup>, the reality is they experience clunky learning management systems crammed full of generic, uninspiring e-learning courses.

### Employees are resisting existing company E-learning



In a recent survey, respondents rated ‘live online learning / self-paced e-learning’ as their least preferred method for learning<sup>12</sup>

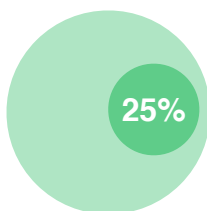


44% of line managers say their employees are unwilling to engage with company online learning<sup>13</sup>



Whilst only 37% of managers say they use E-learning to develop themselves<sup>12</sup>

### L&D’s discomfort with today’s learning environment



Less than 25% of companies feel comfortable with today’s digital learning environment<sup>4</sup>



# The Modern L&D Function

From courses to resources<sup>14</sup>

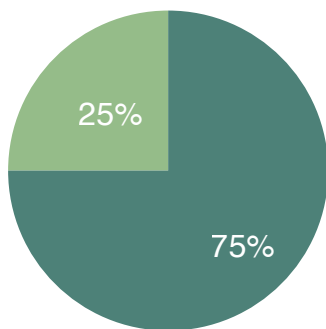
Famously, Einstein reached for a directory when asked for his telephone number. "You don't remember your own number?" he was asked. "No," Einstein answered. "Why should I memorise something I can so easily get from a book?"

## Not-knowing 90% of what's needed for the job

If knowledge workers only retain 8-10% of what they need to know to do their jobs (down from 75% in 1986) how well-equipped are they to find the other 90 percent when they need it in your organisation?<sup>16</sup>

To be clear, this isn't about retaining information after a training session. This is *not knowing* 90% of what they need for their jobs - in totality.

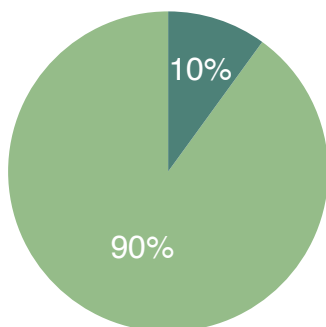
It's easy to see why employees and organisations benefit from easy access to the right resources at the right time. This approach immediately makes learning more relevant, personalised and effective. Learners are encouraged to learn when they need to learn, rather than for a future or past need.



● Retained knowledge  
● Knowledge not held

Knowledge workers used to retain most of what they needed for their job

In **1986**, knowledge workers retained 75% of what they needed to know for their job



● Retained knowledge  
● Knowledge not held

Knowledge workers now only retain up to 10% of what they need to know

By **2006**, knowledge workers were retaining only between 8-10% of the knowledge they needed to do their jobs.

## Custom-made resources - tapping into expertise

The internet and social media has given us all access to experts, their work, and their thinking: directly and in real-time. We also know that the empowered learner values knowledge-sharing and team collaboration over any other forms of learning. The key to making this work in organisations is making knowledge-sharing - and access to *knowledge* and *know-how* - as easy as it is online, outside of the corporate infrastructure.

With 84% employees potentially willing to use technology to share what they know with their peers<sup>13</sup>, companies are increasingly unleashing the power of their own experts.



### **Googler-to-Googler**

Google's Googler-to-Googler program is one good example of how companies promote a learning culture. Karen May, Google's Head of People Operations, says that giving employees teaching roles makes learning a natural part of the way employees work together, rather than something HR makes them do.<sup>7</sup>



### **Disney Digital Lab**

Disney brought together internal digital experts to raise the level of digital awareness in order to capitalise on emerging digital trends. L&D played a facilitation role, whilst the digital expertise that resided in Marketing, Online, IT and Digital Media Distribution co-owned the design and delivery.<sup>18</sup>



### **Learning like YouTube**

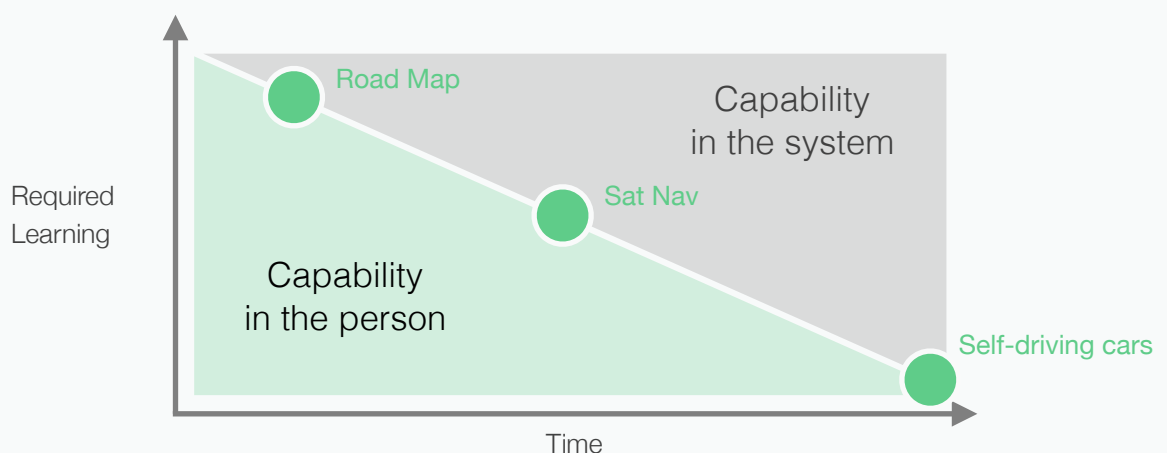
A Telecommunications company in the US, capitalised on the field expertise of their engineers by having them record themselves, with smartphones, repairing customer boxes (many of them obsolete). These recordings were then uploaded onto a platform that allowed other engineers to search and find these *tutorials* as they would on YouTube.<sup>19</sup>



## Learning online, on-demand and on-the-go to directly aid performance

In any organisation, there are examples of high performance and productive work practices that many other employees would benefit from accessing. The opportunity for L&D is to create systems of learning where the knowledge and expertise that already resides within, is available online - at *moments of need*. This capitalises on the habits, preferences and motivations of The Empowered Learner who wishes to *pull* resources online but, unlike a web-search, internal resources can provide context that's relevant to their organisation.

The key here is to not think in terms of providing *learning* but in terms of aiding *performance*. An example of where we accept this is in driving cars, where navigation was passed to a system, of first maps and more recently to SatNav, which “*does not aid learning - it aids performance. It does so by reducing our need to learn - by externalising learning - by handing the learning process to a system.*”<sup>17</sup>





# Conclusion

## Steps forward to reaching the empowered learner

Employees want to learn from their colleagues and have fast, easy access to relevant information and know-how. People want to - and currently do - learn online and if this isn't happening in their organisations then it's time to question the platforms and content instead of learner motivations. L&D needs to facilitate this and support employees in the workflow, helping to reduce the time between learners *not-knowing* something and then *knowing* it, whilst driving improved business performance through increased learner engagement.

Rather than perceiving this new learning environment as a threat or insurmountable challenge, L&D can embrace it and carve out its own role in the modern learning landscape. It's quicker and easier to do so than is commonly believed.



### **Knowledge-Sharing**

Knowledge-sharing and collaboration are the preferred and most effective development methods so find ways to harness this - on and offline. Empower and trust your sharers.

Think: *Intuitive and time-friendly*



### **Performance Support**

Create and curate performance support that can be pulled at the learner's moment of need, in a way that replicates how people do this successfully already online.

Think: *Learner-first and in-the-workflow*



### **Modern Technology**

Find the right technology tools that your learners want to engage with and that will reach and support the 21st century employee - both today and for the future.

Think: *Google and YouTube*

## About David James

David is the former Director of Talent Management, Learning & OD at The Walt Disney Company, EMEA, where he spent 8 years.

Having been involved in L&D since the 1990s, he's been actively involved in procuring, building and launching corporate learning technologies.

David is now Learning Strategist with [loop.co](http://loop.co), working with clients to integrate the Loop platform into learning technology eco-systems and consulting on how to build mobile-first learning content that employees want to truly engage with.

## About Loop

Loop is an online learning platform that helps you to quickly and easily create learning content that is both learner-first and mobile-first.

We believe that corporate learning has remained true to the path it took at the end of the 20th century and yet learner's have become more sophisticated and empowered to direct their own learning agenda. But now it's time for organisational learning to catch up.

Find out more about Loop at [loop.co](http://loop.co) or contact us to know more about *The Empowered Learner* and how we can help you to thrive in this new learning environment.

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