



*A new way of
thinking about
learning & innovation*

BetterChange
Adapt. Evolve. Thrive.

A new way of thinking about learning & innovation

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Think about the 'knowledge system' in your organisation. If it's like most organisations, chances are this system is not working in real time.

Most organisations are faced with rapidly changing internal and external environments. In a context that's changing so quickly, the information being fed into the system quickly becomes irrelevant to the current workforce. It merely becomes an artefact that may be the subject of some future data mining project – but probably not.

Standard approaches to learning are becoming less and less effective. Generic training programmes that are not current-context specific simply waste the trainees' time and cost the organisation.

At BetterChange, we believe there are more powerful options for learning. The focus should be on the ability of people to learn together, in real time; and by accessing what/who they need to, as they need to. We believe there is a gap to be filled by 'in action learning'.

In this White Paper, we propose that learning and innovation are closely linked. The forces of rapid change are causing us to stop and think about *how* and *where* these phenomena are really occurring.

“In the creative economy, innovation is more important than ever. Innovation is the only insurance against irrelevance. It’s the only antidote to margin-crushing competition, the only hope for out-performing a dismal economy, and the only way to truly amaze your customers. Innovation-in operations, products, business models and ecosystems-isn’t merely a competitive advantage, it’s the competitive advantage.”

Gary Hamel, 2012.

What does ‘learning’ mean anyway?

At some stage in our lives, we’ve all been through a poor learning experience. It usually involves irrelevant content, unnecessary outcomes, and de-motivating delivery. In other words, if it felt like a waste of your time – it probably was.

Often the people that benefit most from a learning opportunity are the ones responsible for delivering the experience – the lecturer, consultant, teacher or coach. (They are usually getting paid, after all).

A common problem is that the skills and knowledge transfer may not be sufficiently context-specific, or practically applicable, to make a real impact on the recipient in real time.

We’re not saying that any investment in education or training is lacking in value. But we do question whether organisations are getting maximum value out of typical consulting and training engagements.

And we ask: is it better to create an environment where the workforce itself can engage in more effective ways of learning and innovating? What about ensuring that learning and training services relate directly to the challenge at hand?

People are driving change

Technology is inevitably driving change in the way individuals are learning, researching and innovating. The very channels for educational and training resources are evolving all the time.

For example, how often does your workforce innovate by using Google to collate information, as opposed to using company information hidden in vast document management systems?

Experimental projects – or free time to pursue novel concepts and solutions – are all but non-existent in the majority of organisations. Yet these kinds of options have the potential to provide the organisation with future resilience, at very little additional cost.

The general approach to training sometimes misses the mark due to its timing and/or inappropriate content. Knowing about a topic or skill is not the same thing as being able to actually employ it in practise. That’s what we mean by ‘in action learning’.

Learning to learn differently

In the report, *Future Work Skills 2020*, the Institute for the Future in California, US, has identified the emergence of the following skills over the next decade:

1. Sense-making
2. Social intelligence
3. Novel and adaptive thinking
4. Cross-cultural competency
5. Computational thinking
6. New-media literacy
7. Transdisciplinarity
8. Design mindset
9. Cognitive load management
10. Virtual collaboration

The report proposes that: “To be successful in the next decade, individuals will need to demonstrate foresight in navigating a rapidly shifting landscape of organisational forms and skill requirements. They will increasingly be called upon to continually reassess the skills they need, and quickly put together the right resources to develop and update these. Workers in the future will need to be adaptable and lifelong learners.”

We think it's interesting to note that nearly all of these predictions have something in common. They require the workforce to be constantly thinking and adjusting their approach to the changing world – all of which will require ongoing learning, innovation and adaptation.

Translating learning into innovation

As outlined earlier, today's workforce is increasingly comfortable with the ability to 'self-educate in flight'.

More and more, they expect to be able to identify their own requirements, and serve those requirements. When we think about it, this is effectively how the process of innovation itself occurs.

Scientists and other theorists engaged in innovative practises begin with a deep understanding of the subject matter. (This is how they learn what they don't know, and what they need to know).

We can apply the same to workers or frontline staff. They're the ones in a position to identify the myriad of incremental innovations that deliver on-going competitive advantage.

And creating competitive advantage is the true value of learning for any organisation.

A better approach to learning

At BetterChange, we believe a new approach to learning is required.

We need to think differently about what people need to learn, and why.
We need to think differently about what constitutes organisational knowledge.
Most importantly, we need to think deeply about creating environments in which the workforce can learn and innovate.

The following are our principles for building effective learning systems:

Stay networked. Create networks, both internally and externally, that will facilitate and leverage your organisation's collective intelligence.

Embrace just-in-time knowledge. This concept doesn't only belong in logistics; it applies to knowledge too. The aim is to learn what is required, when it's required.

Let the knowledge flow. Unless there's a good reason, don't keep organisational knowledge locked away in silos, or high-level meetings. Let it flow through the organisation.

Create a learning environment. Innovation is too important to be left to chance. Organisations need to design an environment where ideas and experimentation can occur.

Encourage 'learning to do'. Remember, we no longer have the luxury of time to dabble in 'theories'. It's more efficient, and more effective, to learn through action.

Real learning begins today

BetterChange has developed a robust platform for translating learning and innovation into new products, services and organisational capability.

If you're ready for a different approach, we'd welcome the opportunity to share these ideas with you.

Today's concept of 'learning' means something different than it used to. The new learning style illustrates the transformation:



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