

# THE FUTURE OF LEARNING AND WORK



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## BIG THINKERS FORECAST THE NEXT BIG MOVES

**A**s anyone who regularly checks in at the office via text message will tell you, traditional notions about work space and hours are beginning to vanish. People work just as hard if not harder, but they might spend more time away from the office. Such trends are changing the face of the workforce. As the talent pool undergoes a major demographic shift, learning professionals need to collect a new set of data. The next generation shows early signs of being a more diverse workforce spread across a more dispersed workplace. Recruiting, training, and managing talent will continue to be in great demand, but they are about to undergo substantial change.

*T+D* asked thought leaders in the field to forecast their expectations about the next generation. They include Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education; Malcolm Gladwell, bestselling author and staff writer for the *New Yorker*; Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*; Noel Tichy, professor at the University of Michigan and author with Warren Bennis of *Judgment*; Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*; Tom Rath, author of *Strength Finder 2.0*; Mark Penn, CEO of public relations firm Burson-Marsteller and author of *Microtrends*; and Tamara J. Erickson, president of the Concours Institute.

**Q:** What skills will be most prized in the upcoming labor market?

**Florida:** Creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Economic growth is driven by creativity. For the first time in human history, the basic logic of our economy dictates that further economic development requires continued development and use of creative human capabilities. Creative workers

**Q:** If there is one ongoing problem in workplace training that should be addressed in the future, what is it?

**Gardner:** When we are young, we expect formal teaching from others, especially those who are more knowledgeable than we are. It used to be that the training received in the first two decades of your life would suffice for a long time.



**TOM RATH**



**NOEL TICHY**



**TAMARA J. ERICKSON**



**MARK PENN**

who are willing to take risks, make innovative decisions, and think critically will set themselves apart in the creative economy. In today's workplace, we have to realize our full talents: self-express and self-actualize.

**Penn:** The ability to lead teams that are composed of very different personality types. There is a premium on individuality and self-expression. Effective managers will embrace this diversity rather than resist it, especially among younger employees.

There will also be a need to respect the diverse identities of clients, customers, and constituents. It's their preferences that are driving the economy. And, of course, the ability to spot new, industry-relevant microtrends—the small, under-the-radar forces that can make or break a business, initiate political change, or launch a social movement.

**Gladwell:** The social dimension of idea discovery will be more important. Knowing where to find an idea in a large organization is as important as coming up with it yourself. In the past, we put a lot of emphasis on the latter. In the future, we'll put a lot of emphasis on the former. Employees in organizations such as Proctor and Gamble had to unlearn this notion.

Now, as the cliché goes, we must all become lifelong learners. And yet, too many workers do not have the skills to continue educating themselves and to make optimal use of learning opportunities, be they written, oral, through modeling, or through peer contacts.

Even more damagingly, many managers and executives either expect their workers to educate themselves, use instructional methods that are too simplistic and have little spin-off, or do not themselves know how to continue learning. We all talk about the importance of “learning organizations,” but I fear that the reality is still a rarity.

**Tichy:** Trainers and training methods are the problem, from both internal staff and consultants.

When I ran General Electric's Leadership Institute Crotonville, New York, facility in the 1980s, Jack Welch asked me to revamp the leadership and management programs. We transformed it into an action-learning platform for thousands of GE leaders to work on real problems for the businesses, including four-week programs where we would send teams to Asia. With action learning, participants are required to work outside of their comfort zones. During the process, participants are evaluated on both performance and leadership behavior.

Initially, training was delivered to all 300,000 GE employees who completed multiple workshops to eliminate bureaucracy and learn new skills such as process mapping. After a few years, we redesigned the training to give the company's 20,000 leaders the ability to run their own workshops. This teaching model, where leaders are taught to run workshops using a teachable point of view, is practiced in many companies today. In many companies, the training staff has to be replaced because they are locked into old mindsets and behavior patterns.

**Erickson:** One problem is that there's not enough training, and it's not available to a broad enough population. Companies need to take a much more active role in the education of the workforce.

In some organizations, training tends to be too episodic, general, and focused on young employees. Companies need to shift resources toward learning opportunities that are ongoing and on-demand and that are specifically geared to a worker's current task. Boomers, with their increasing life expectancy, are rethinking retirement and are also interested in significant learning opportunities.

## **Q:** How will organizations attract and retain top talent? What kinds of initiatives might be introduced to groom new leaders and engage top performers?

**Erickson:** Learning will be an absolutely critical element of organizations' abilities to attract and retain top talent. First, the opportunity to learn is the number 1 factor that younger workers consider when selecting an employer. Companies that can offer a broad-based learning program have a serious recruiting edge over firms with less robust programs. A rich learning environment will be important, not only to young workers, but also to older workers seeking opportunities to refocus their careers in new directions. Offering challenging assignments is a critical element of retention.

Second, companies will need educational programs because, in most cases, there will not be enough candidates with the preferred educational credentials. Specifically, there will be a shortage of college-educated candidates, initially in math, science, and engineering-related disciplines, but also college graduates in general. Companies will need to recruit people who do not have the requisite degree, and fill any capability gaps after the hire.

Younger workers prefer challenging tasks, often ones that they don't know how to do. They value the opportunity to figure things out which typically involves tapping a network of experienced colleagues who can teach them.

**Tichy:** In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, human capital is the differentiator. Talent is the game in a knowledge economy. Successful organizations are those with leaders at all levels continuously teaching and learning and thus are capable of making good judgments. Attracting talent means more than just recruiting domestically. Infosys and Tata Industries are global players who compete in Bangalore and other parts of India for global talent. They are both engaged in significant action-learning leadership development efforts. Everyone has to be world class at having leaders at all levels, leaders teaching leaders, with judgment being the key variable of success.

## **Q:** If coaching is the hot commodity of the current decade, what's next? What kinds of development services will be in demand in the coming years?

**Gardner:** We will continue to need coaches. But these coaches will work not to inculcate specific skills or attitudes but rather to make themselves unnecessary. That is, the successful coach is one who has inculcated lifelong learning in the individual and in the organization. I would not worry about unemployment for such a coach. There is plenty of work to be done everywhere.

## **Q:** What will be the prevailing personality of the next generation of managers? How will it differ from current and previous generations that were labeled command and control, passive aggressive, or micromanaging?

**Ferriss:** The next generation will be output managers who set clear objectives for their employees. They'll be hands-off and results-oriented. With remote employees, micromanaging becomes obsolete.

**Erickson:** Our research shows that many individuals in their 30s and early 40s today have some serious reservations about moving up the corporate ladder. As teens, many watched their parents or other significant adults in their lives get laid off from major corporations. The idea of leaving their fate in the hands of potentially capricious corporations makes many uneasy. There is a strong undercurrent of preference for entrepreneurial activities among this group, unless they feel they will make it all the way to the top spot.

As a generalization, the personality of Generation X reflects a bit of unease over the possibility that negative events could happen in the future. As a result, they have a desire to keep multiple options open. They are also the most likely to feel that they are at a dead end and to worry about being laid off or fired.

As a result of Gen X preferences, many of the next wave of managerial roles will probably go directly to Generation Y. This group tends to be more confident and optimistic than many of the Xers. As managers they are likely to adopt a collaborative, technology-based work approach.

**Tichy:** The debate about an old versus a new generation of managers is nonsense. Our research shows that leaders have one primary job, which is to make good judgments about people, strategy, and crisis situations. In addition, they need to develop the next generation of leaders to make good judgments.

Great leadership has been around for thousands of years. James MacGregor Burns, in his book *Leadership*, talked about transformational and transactional leaders. The transformational ones fundamentally altered the organization for the betterment of the people inside. There have been transformational leaders among all generations. Jack Welch was one who made the lives of more than 300,000 GE employees better. To get there he had to save the company and endure some pain. This is true of A.G. Lafley's amazing turnaround at Procter & Gamble, and the work of Jim McNerney at 3M and now Boeing.

## **Q:** Besides ongoing concerns about the skills gap, are there other gaps that organizations need to prepare for?

**Penn:** As the gender gap begins to close in the workplace, more and more people are finding that love is in the cube next door. Almost 60 percent of U.S. employees say they've been involved in an office romance. Yet only 1 in 5 companies have policies concerning this. It's time for new guidelines regarding dating and breakups, within the office and with clients and competitors, and support for couples who work together.

More employees are working far away from their homes, far away from their spouses, or far away from the workplace itself. Today 3.4 million people travel at least 90 minutes each way to get to work. Don't count on them for a lot of overtime. Another 3.5 million workers live away from their spouses during the workweek. They may be happy to keep on working past dinner. Another 4.2 million people work entirely from home, work more hours, and report greater job satisfaction. They need to stay connected, train in teleconferences, and have places to meet colleagues and customers.

# Companies will need to recruit people who do not have the requisite degree, and fill any capability gaps after the hire.

What's also notable are the 17 million people who are caring for aging and infirm relatives. Companies lose tens of billions of dollars a year due to departing workers, absenteeism, and interruptions from employees taking care of infirm relatives. As life expectancy grows, the care gap will only widen, and male and female employees alike need a solution.

**Gardner:** The biggest gap, in my view, might be termed the "ethics gap." Too many of our best and brightest young people lack an ethical conscience. They have not had good mentors or role models, for the most part, and they have a very strong success ethic. To them, success means monetary wealth and autonomy, rather than leading an exemplary life. Too many young people say that they can't afford to be ethical now—but they intend to be once they have "made it." In the short run, this approach may be viable. In the long run, it is disastrous for the individual, the organization, and the wider society.

**Florida:** We are facing a significant global need for creative talent. Worldwide the competition for human capital is intensifying. When older workers retire, we're likely to see the largest shortage of skills and talent in history. We need to start today by retraining, providing better education, and fully preparing our workforce. The creative economy requires a new set of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and an entrepreneurial attitude.

Employers also have to think more about human-capital management. Effectively managing creative talent is the most important decision a company will make for its future. Generally speaking, employers can do three things. First, an employer must eliminate distractions for its workers. This allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Second, managers must spark creativity from environment and atmosphere to aesthetics. Finally, employers must engage workers as equal partners in the company's future. Long-term

employment is essential. Creativity is embedded in relationships and thrives among people who have worked together for a long time.

**Gladwell:** There's a class dimension to the skills gap. It's the 40th percentile. They're the students who did not get past high school. They work on the production line mindlessly turning out widgets. We didn't think about them before, but now we need them. It's talent we can no longer afford to waste. This is a fundamental public education issue. We spend so much time worrying about the top 20 percent—the people who get a B+ on their AP calculus exam or can't get into Harvard. The top 20 percent is going to be fine.

**Q:** Can you imagine any tool that could reshape the workforce in the way that email, the Internet, and Wikipedia have made work easier?

**Ferriss:** I think there could be some kind of software that allows employers to monitor the effectiveness of remote employees. For reasons that are good for both employees and employers, it's inevitable that soon a lot of people will not go to an office to work. This will really create a global pool of talent. There will be a need for a tool that can evaluate their performance.

**Gladwell:** Wikipedia and Google are 21st century solutions to 19th century problems. They're just more updated libraries that allow you to use more space. They're a solution to a problem we didn't have. The real issue in the 21st century is how to make sense of all that information. We need to be able to analyze all of that information intelligently. In the next 10 to 15 years, we need to use our brains more effectively. There's no tool I can imagine that can replace that.

**Q:** Is there an emerging demographic of workers yet to be identified with particular characteristics in terms of age or experience level?

**Ferriss:** In terms of age it's difficult to say. There is an emerging group nearing retirement age that is building a life plan with a more dispersed retirement. They're the "new rich." They treat time and mobility as currency in addition to money. They sprint for 'x' period of time. They'll work for six months and then take two months off. Or they'll work for two months and take two weeks off.

**Penn:** Summer interns aren't the naifs they used to be. Kids as young as 12 are starting their own businesses, especially

online, and they can make good money. They won't necessarily bypass college or business school, but you can bet they don't want to spend too long getting coffee or filing documents.

And at the other end of the scale are the working retired, the estimated 5 million workers who are 65 or older. Three out of four baby boomers say they have no intention of seeking a traditional retirement. They want to stay on or they want to start their own ventures that might compete with yours. In the same way that women once transformed workplace practices, now benefits managers should expect requests for winter vacations, low-sodium food in the cafeteria, and payments for prescription drugs.

**Q:** If organizations embrace the concept of developing employees' strengths instead of fixing their weaknesses, that could make a serious dent in familiar processes that look for competency gaps to correct. If an approach to development based on strengths were to gain critical mass in organizations, how would that change the role of trainers?

**Rath:** It would force trainers to spend more time on the individual versus the content, because the strengths approach is all about starting with a person's unique talents and then filling in knowledge gaps. So trainers would need to invest a bit more time and effort. But our studies suggest that this would also provide for a greater return on each hour invested.

Today, we spend roughly 75 percent of our time trying to add what nature left out, and if we're lucky, we might get to spend 25 percent of our time developing our strengths. The problem with this remedial model is that our confidence, productivity, and well-being are simply destroyed when we are forced to spend this much time on our weaknesses.

If trainers can help people turn this around, and perhaps spend just 25 percent of the time on weakness-prevention activities, they will have students who are much more engaged. And I would also be willing to bet that the trainers would have a lot more energy to take home at the end of each day. **T+D**

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*This interview was conducted by Michael Laff, senior associate editor of T+D; mlaff@astd.org.*

## What's In



- Simultaneous learning experiences
- Just-in-time knowledge
- Simulations
- Flash for PowerPoint presentations
- Many experts (such as Wikipedia)
- Informal learning
- Talent management integration
- Creative benefits, including pet insurance
- Growing leaders inside the company
- Recruiting in Second Life
- Global sourcing
- Retired and employed
- Home offices, “officetels,” and “caving”
- Leader as teacher and coach
- Talent management systems
- Chief talent officer
- Business leaders responsible for learning
- Business and line partnerships
- Strategic business needs
- Continuous improvement
- Measured productivity
- Strategic supplier partnership
- Social networking

- Sequential learning experiences
- Massive training delivery plans
- Games without a purpose
- Sophisticated authoring tools
- Subject matter experts
- Formal learning
- HRD silos
- Standard, unimaginative benefits to attract workers
- Recruiting leaders from outside company
- Face-to-face recruiting
- Talent management
- Retired and relaxing
- Commuting
- Leader as sponsor and host
- Learning management systems
- Chief learning officer
- CLO responsible for learning
- T&D-driven initiatives
- Individual needs assessment
- Achieving results
- Performance
- Outsourcing
- Knowledge management

## What's Out



**Participants:** Donna McNamara, Clark Aldrich, Kevin Oakes, Candice Phelan, Marc Rosenberg, and Elaine Biech.