



## About ACCA

**ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global body for professional accountants, offering business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to people of application, ability and ambition around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management.**

ACCA supports its **208,000** members and **503,000** students in **179** countries, helping them to develop successful careers in accounting and business, with the skills required by employers. ACCA works through a network of **104** offices and centres and more than **7,300** Approved Employers worldwide, who provide high standards of employee learning and development. Through its public interest remit, ACCA promotes appropriate regulation of accounting and conducts relevant research to ensure accountancy continues to grow in reputation and influence.

ACCA is currently introducing major innovations to its flagship qualification to ensure its members and future members continue to be the most valued, up to date and sought-after accountancy professionals globally.

Founded in 1904, ACCA has consistently held unique core values: opportunity, diversity, innovation, integrity and accountability.

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# Learning for the future

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## About this report

This report is the result of roundtables and interviews conducted in 2018 of ACCA members, affiliates and students across the globe. It includes the results of surveys of this audience upon their views of learning in the workplace. Possessing the skills to ensure that as individuals they remain relevant throughout their evolving career is essential. This is especially true in times of change in the workplace.



# Foreword



**We recognise that the accountant of the future requires a diverse and broad range of skills to be successful and to be relevant in this dynamic world. Our career patterns and pathways are evolving – the certainties of a few years ago are replaced by evolving and stimulating opportunities. Ensuring that we have, develop and maintain the relevant skills and knowledge is essential. The opportunities to learn are changing too. Never has there been a time where being attuned to our personal journey has been more important.**

The future of learning in the workplace is inexorably linked to that personal journey. Firstly we need the support of our peers, colleagues and fellow professionals. Effective mentoring and coaching is essential across the profession. As a professional body we recognise the important role that we have to play in this and have recently introduced a programme to facilitate potential mentors and mentees making those important connections.

As the dynamics of work change our ability to demonstrate our capabilities, to ensure that as we move forward in our careers they facilitate our next step, is ever more important. The range of learning opportunities available to us is increasing. Virtual learning from a range of credible sources is at our finger tips. We need to be cautious, however, to select those interventions that support our ability to perform at the level that our current job role, and next, job role requires.

ACCA continues to evolve its range of learning opportunities through the continuing professional development programme. We recognise the important role that our partners such as learning providers have in enabling us to deliver this, and it is pleasing to see their contributions, amongst others, reflected in this research.

The professional quotients provide a structure for our members to reflect upon the skills needed to facilitate this evolution. The changes to the qualification, including the introduction of ACCA's Strategic Professional and within this our ground breaking Strategic Business Leader case study examination, reflect these shifts. For our students and members this will be a continual, evolving, exciting journey.

The learning of the future is a dynamic personal journey; one that we all need to embrace if we are to ensure that we, as individuals, remain relevant to a profession that is relevant to its communities.

**Alan Hatfield**

Executive Director – Strategy and Development, ACCA

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# Introduction

**The ever-increasing use of automation in the workplace is challenging the traditional job roles for accountants and finance teams, both in practices and in business.**

As a society, we also have different expectations of our career development than our predecessors in previous economic eras, but we are also expected to contribute to the workplace for far longer than previous generations.

As individuals, therefore, we need to ensure that our personal skill sets remain relevant to this changing workplace, thereby ensuring that we can fulfil our own potential in the way that we would like. The development of our personal skill set in the workplace has never been more important.

This report, based upon surveys, roundtables and interviews with ACCA members and students and those in the learning and development (L&D)

profession, considers how, as an individual, you should seek to approach your own career development in the workplace. It also looks at the impact on the employer, both from the perspective of somebody providing guidance in the development of others and from that of the overall L&D framework in an organisation.

The report includes several illustrative pieces from experienced commentators to provide additional perspectives upon some of the points discussed.

The accountancy profession, like many other professions, faces several significant challenges from social and technological change. ACCA's previous reports, *Professional accountants – the future: Drivers of change and future skills* (ACCA

2016a) and *Professional accountants – the future: Generation Next* (ACCA 2016b), have looked at the technical and social trends affecting the profession. This report looks closer at the implications for staff development of these trends.

It starts by considering the changing role of accountants and how various forces affect our skill and technical knowledge. It then considers how individuals can make themselves ready for the change, before looking at the future of learning in the workplace.

It concludes by considering the actions that the individual, the employer and the L&D community in the profession should take in response.



# Executive summary

**The working place is changing. Social and technological developments are changing our working lives and careers. The traditional career paths of the accountancy profession are now no longer the norms. Employers are expecting more from those who join the profession and as individuals we are also seeking to have a professional role for a longer part of our lives, as the demographics of the working population change.**

More variable career structures mean that individuals must demonstrate their abilities as they seek new and more challenging opportunities. Increasingly, we look to the next career move to enhance our skills and capabilities – to add to our curriculum vitae (CV) the competency necessary to achieve the next career move. We are, however, uncertain and seek reassurance from others through mentoring relationships that provide guidance on the right choices to make.

As individuals we are increasingly responsible for our own career choices and the traditional reliance on the employer to support us is decreasing. Employers now look to train, hire or borrow staff. The borrowing of staff reflects the need to seek specialist skills for a short

period of time and place the individuals back in the workplace. The enlightened employer recognises the need to develop individuals during this time.

The choices of methods of learning are increasing. There are more providers that offer courses online, available at any time to address our skill need. No longer is all learning provided by the corporate entity.

As learners, therefore, we need to be educated to understand what activities we can undertake to achieve the performance level that we are seeking, and to prove to others that we have the capability to perform at the level required in that next role. We need to understand more about how we learn and to appreciate the experiences that we need from the range of options available.

For employers, too, the learning landscape is changing. They need to embrace the variability of content and providers. They need to recognise that they do not have to provide everything – rather to advise on the opportunities and embrace the social interactions that turn learning content into skill and capability. In this profession, our people are our asset and because we need to differentiate ourselves increasingly through quality of service, the quality of the talent is essential.

Our L&D teams need to reflect this new reality too; adopting a more collaborative and responsive approach, which is closely aligned to the organisational strategy.

The opportunity is clear. Both as individuals and as employers, it is important to think about how the skills needed in the changing world are developed.

# 1. The changing world of accountants

There are several significant trends changing the world of the accountant. These range from technological to social factors, each of which has a direct impact on career paths and the skills needed. In turn, these influence how we, as individuals, develop the skills that we need.

The traditional career pathways are evolving and are leading us to rethink our personal journeys as a result. No longer do we have common career progressions; rather we have flexibility and choice in what we do and how we gather the skills necessary for us to be successful.

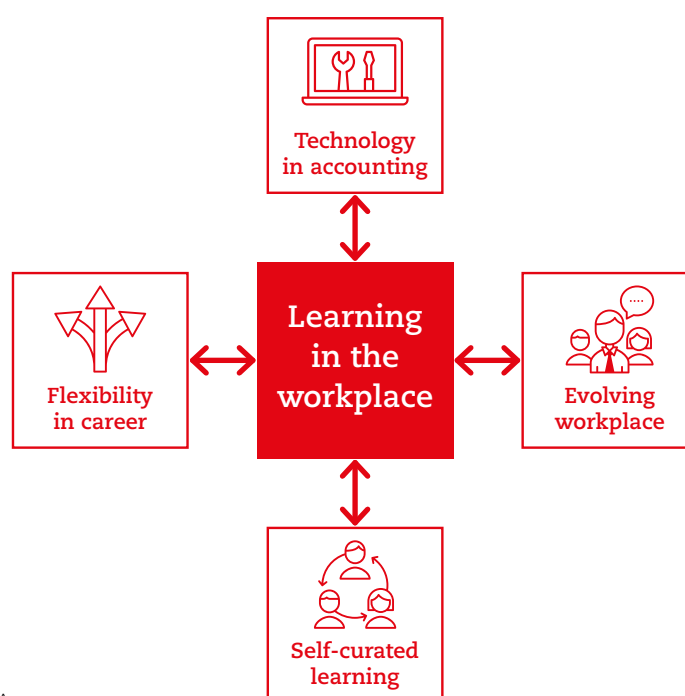
The learning journey is a very personal thing. As Christine Olivier, of online learning provider AVADO noted: 'It's simple really: it's all about the learners and their individual needs. A key focus area on our roadmap is to enable more data-driven, personalised learning experiences. Everyone is different, so we must go that extra mile to engage our learners with the right resources, at the right time.'

Matt Dolphin, finance director of train company Greater Anglia in the UK, notes his view of the changing role of the accountant in business and the implication for skills, 'I think that businesses are becoming much more of a self-service environment. So, colleagues in operations, instead of waiting for their weekly numbers to come out, will just look at the iPad, press a button, it's there. So, I see the role of the finance colleague to be more of understanding how to move the data into information, translating that across the business and giving a view and an opinion about how that might impact the business.'

We can characterise this changing world with four factors, each of which is changing the roles that accountants perform and, singularly and in combination, causing us to rethink our personal growth journeys.

There are four dynamics of change that are causing us to reappraise our personal learning journeys, as shown in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1: Four dynamics of change in workplace learning



Source: ACCA



For those about to enter the profession, interpretation of data, communication, vision and strategy will be top responsibilities in future.

### 1.1 TECHNOLOGY IN ACCOUNTING

The first dynamic is technology. ACCA's report *The Race for Relevance* (ACCA 2017) highlighted six technologies that are having an impact on accounting and finance. These were cloud-based computing, data analytics, robotic process automation, social media, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence (AI). In various combinations, for any enterprise, these have the potential to change ways of working, to automate job tasks and require new skills.

Domino's Pizza Group, Group Financial Controller, Victoria Booth also discussed those changes during our Business Leaders Network held in London. For her, 'today, with more data available, it's really about critical analysis and problem-solving and getting to the heart of what information is telling you. So for me it is key finance have three dimensions, a balance of emotional skills ; soft skills; and the technical skills; which provides the ability to actually engage and translate their knowledge into layman's language, and provides critical analysis for driving clarity and understanding in support of business decisions'.

### 1.2 THE EVOLVING WORKPLACE

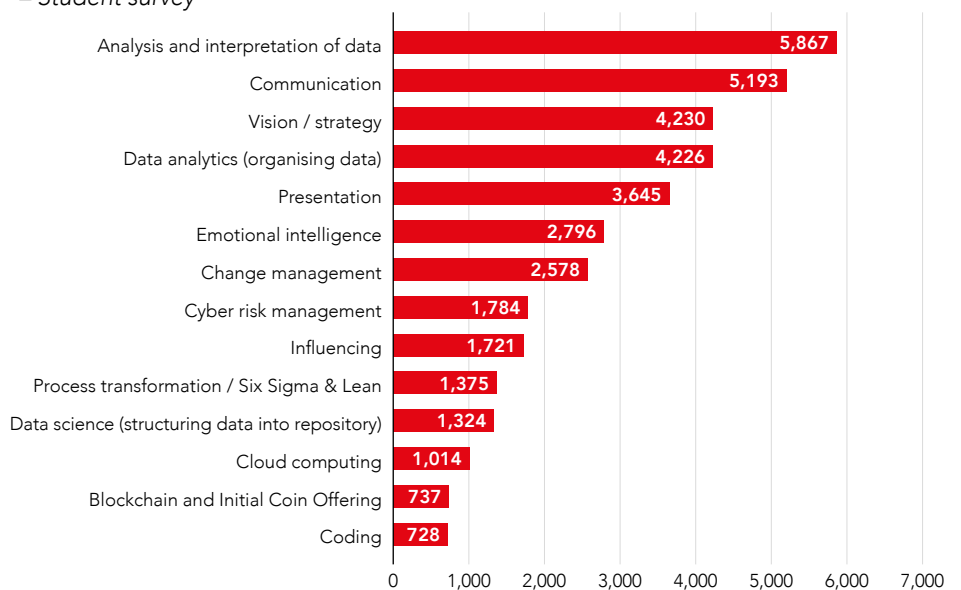
#### Changing skill requirement

ACCA's 2018 student survey<sup>1</sup> showed that those about to enter the profession are well aware of those changes in the role of accountants. For them, interpretation of data, communication, vision and strategy will be top responsibilities in future (Figure 1.2).

As technology is changing the world of accountants, a number of the groups in ACCA's student roundtables considered their own perceived position as a result of these trends. Most groups considered that these shifts made them vulnerable and uncertain about the potential roles that would be open to them.

In a roundtable with undergraduates in London, some expressed concerns about the impact on their long-term careers. While one asked 'how long before I become completely useless?' Another thought that perhaps universities, learning providers and professional bodies should explain better 'what the profession is about, what students are learning and why it is important – so that you can see how you would use it in real life'.

**FIGURE 1.2:** Which skills do you feel are most critical to your development? – Student survey



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 7,785 respondents

<sup>1</sup> In this report the term 'student' in relation to the figures refers to ACCA students and affiliates who completed the survey undertaken in July 2018.

**Cost and business model pressures are constantly forcing organisations to think about the skills that they need and how they might obtain them.**

One of the participants in the Hong Kong roundtable put it this way: 'I think as a learner, one of the questions that I will have is "what to learn?" Because we can be stable in our learning, like the standards, or whatever it is. But the uncertainty is outside. Because the environment is ever-changing, how can I really be sensitive to what subject or to what topic I have to prepare for?'

As individuals, we need to be flexible and adaptable in our career choices and our goals. Michael O'Connell, an accountancy recruitment specialist, continued this theme in ACCA's Australian roundtable. 'I don't think you can set a career path anymore, because the world is changing so quickly. The roles that we'll do in 10, 15, 20 years might not exist now, so how do you plan a career around that? So, I think perhaps getting a broad knowledge base and broad experience base is probably the best way to set up for the future.'

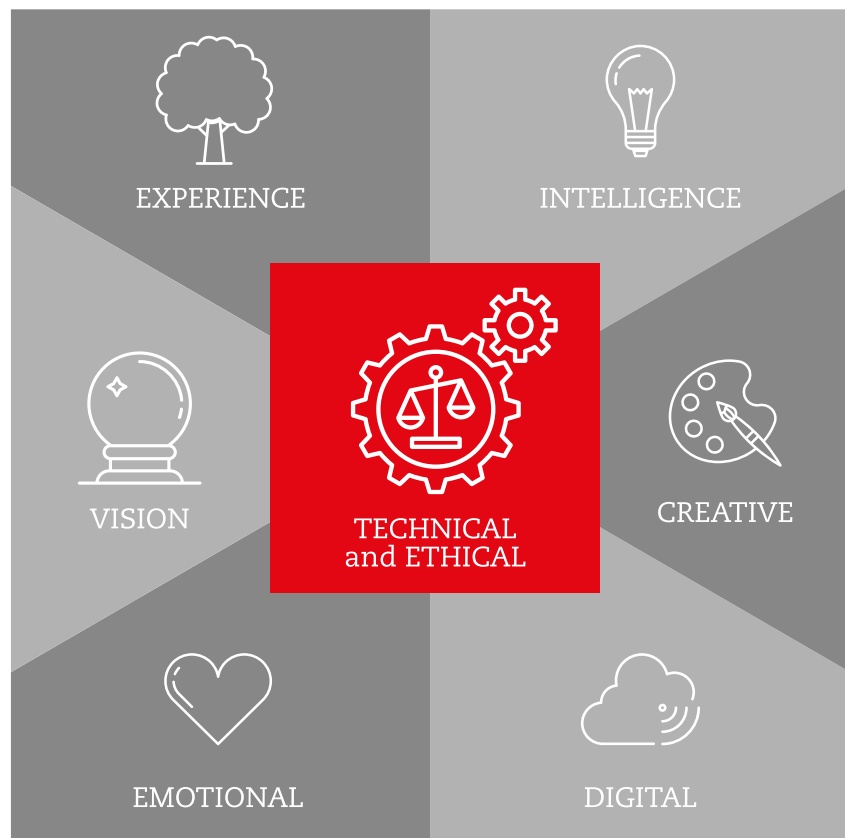
Cost and business model pressures are constantly forcing organisations to think

about the skills that they need and how they might obtain them. Having the right skills, and the ability to demonstrate them, will be key to personal success.

ACCA's report *Professional accountants – the future: Drivers of change and future skills* (ACCA 2016a) introduced the concept of seven professional quotients that reflect the skills that an accountant needs to be effective in the workplace and build a successful long-term career (Figure 1.3). ACCA's roundtables and discussions have reinforced the importance of these quotients in ensuring future success.

Across these roundtables, in both the student and employer groups, when asked about how they, as individuals, increased their level of capability in the quotients, contributors referred to achieving growth through experience rather than formal, structured, learning programmes. This raises questions about where both individuals and employers should invest in seeking personal skill development.

**FIGURE 1.3:** Professional quotients for success



Source: ACCA (2016a)

People seek to join organisations that will benefit their overall personal brand and that align with their personal philosophies.

**Changing expectations**

Many of the traditional perceptions of work are being increasingly challenged by evolving business models (ACCA 2018). This highlights the impact of changing business structures on organisations as traditional ones give way to more flexible and dynamic team-based structures where skill sets are increasingly key to participation. This then affects the career strategies that we develop for ourselves.

ACCA's *Professional Accountants – the future: Generation Next* report (ACCA 2016b) highlights the differing career aspirations of and challenges for those under the age of 36. That report indicates that they are a transitory population looking for challenging opportunities outside their current employment. They are technologically savvy; have a global outlook, often expecting to work in another country in their next role or at some time in their careers; and work-life balance, as well as gaining a variety of experiences, is important to them. In fact, they will switch jobs quickly to attain what they want from their careers – out of over 18,000 respondents, more than 70% said they were expecting to change role within two years.

The results of the 2018 survey of ACCA's global students and affiliates population confirmed this appetite for developing a portfolio of experiences as opposed to a more linear, increasingly specialised career (Figure 1.4).

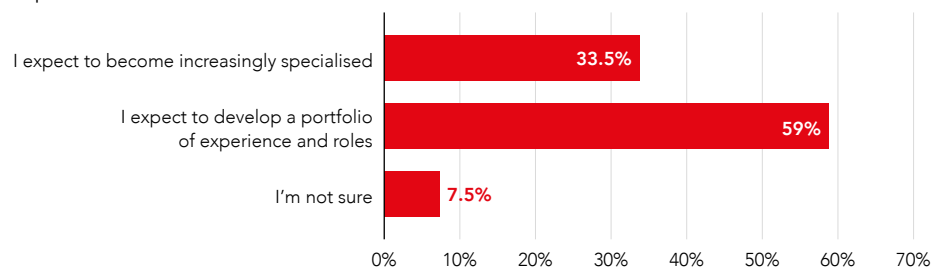
People seek to join organisations that will benefit their overall personal brand and that align with their personal philosophies. They are looking for experiences that enable them to grow and be ready for their next role. They are increasingly curious.

**Blurred progression lines**

One of the key implications of the adoption of business transformations that are supported by these emerging technologies is that lower-level roles are increasingly disappearing and entrants are expected to undertake more complex tasks at the start of their careers. At the Singapore roundtable, Michael Lin addressed the impact of this changing environment on learning: 'I think the real question you want to ask is that how do you accelerate the learning of a young accountant to match someone who has 20 years' worth of experience and knowledge?'

Chantel Samanek, director of Grey Insight, a learning organisation based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), noted, 'the roles that they are performing, a) are becoming slightly scaled down [through] the generations as the technology kicks [in] more and more..., but b) also becom[ing] more...niche or smaller. The content of the big role, potentially it has gone, and you can become an expert far quicker because we demand expertise in more niche areas.'

**FIGURE 1.4:** As you develop in your career, do you expect that your roles will become increasingly specialised in specific areas, or instead develop a portfolio of varied experiences and roles?



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 8,016 respondents

**Individuals perform roles on a short- to medium-term basis as part of in-house teams, providing a specific skill and helping permanent staff members to acquire all or part of that skill set.**

This shift in task, however, potentially threatens the more middle-management roles and many of the oversight functions that they have typically performed are becoming automated. In turn, these are the individuals who have traditionally provided developmental support to those in more junior roles. This creates greater pressure not to offer this support at a time when it is increasingly needed.

There are ever fewer common and consistent career paths; rather, there are personal paths that benefit us all as individuals. Employers may find this challenging as they seek to manage a far more diverse working environment with shorter-term needs. The challenge for employers is to recognise the need to invest for the benefit of current and future roles, accepting that some of that investment may crystallise in future job roles that might be outside their organisation, but in exchange benefiting equally from investments made by others.

#### **Hire, train or borrow?**

Approaches to resourcing are also changing. Workforce planning discussions have traditionally addressed questions of whether there are staff that can be developed into roles or whether recruitment is necessary; many organisations are now including a 'borrow' option whereby employees are hired for a specified period to cover a certain phase of growth in the business.

As a result, and as Michael O'Connell commented at the Australian roundtable, 'that's where it's more important, I think

these days, that the actual person themselves takes ownership of their own development as well, because you can find yourself spinning pretty quickly'.

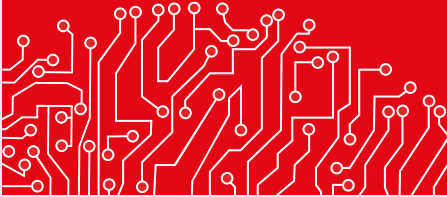
The 'borrow' option reflects the increasing importance of the so-called gig-economy in our society. Individuals perform roles on a short- to medium-term basis as part of in-house teams, providing a specific skill and helping permanent staff members to acquire all or part of that skill set.

The growth of this segment of the economy challenges the responsibility of the employer for their staff development. As one of the interviewees commented, you need either, as an employer, to be willing to be benevolent and accept that you are developing individuals for the wider benefit of society or to place the onus entirely on the individual. Employers need to make a choice.

At ACCA's Kenyan roundtable, one of the participants commented that their company was 'very keen on making sure you are employable and certain about your job, so we can export you, and we are very proud when we say, that was my person; I exported that person to that organisation'.

Other economies, such as those in the Gulf States, have traditionally relied on a model of economic migrants spending a few years to gain skills and financial reward before returning to their home economy. There are potential shifts in this model as automation challenges the roles available within that traditional learning ground.

## Workplace learning: a series of generational challenges?



### **The workplace itself is changing. Here are the views of a number of people involved in providing L&D for today's workforce.**

In more Western societies we face the reality of four generations in the workplace. Kristin Furber, a manager at Workforce Capability Development, The Public Trustee, based in Brisbane, commented: 'We don't only have two or three [generations], we've got four. It's the first time in history that we've had four. We have people at the age of 70 still in the workplace with people who are 18–20. That's a massive range of ages and people with different needs and expectations.'

This diverse range of individuals means that we should challenge our traditional approach to skill growth. As employers we need to be prepared to tackle a wider range of skills and behaviours in the workplace than were found in other eras.

Michael O'Connell, at the same roundtable, commented: 'We've also got people that have come up [during] different eras of that learning environment as well. While we create a learning environment for the current generation, there are past generations in a very big organisation that still have to learn and they don't learn the same way.'

Increases in human lifespans will change the approach to learning in the workplace as careers extend and more career changes naturally occur. In their book *The 100-Year Life*, Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott comment: 'The majority of children born in rich countries today can expect to live to more than a 100. This increase in life expectancy has been happening for decades and yet we continue to structure

our lives the way our parents or even grandparents did' (Gratton and Scott 2016).

In contrast, however, in more emerging economies the challenge is that the workforce is typically younger in profile. Clear divides between groups within populations are opening up within some economies where approximately 50% of their population is around 20 years old. Employers need to consider how we develop the individuals looking for growth in such a population.

The fact that nearly half of the workforce is currently consists of 'millennials' was something extensively discussed in ACCA's roundtables across Sub-Saharan Africa. In Kenya, David Mbatha, director and head of management consulting at KPMG, concludes that 'We have to recognise that they are learning much faster and much quicker, and it is natural that [millennials] want much more... We have to recognise that the pace of learning is faster, the pace of the world is much quicker. While experience is very important, the technical skills are being learnt at an enormously fast pace'.

There is a risk that we fixate on perceived generational differences. Paolo Giuricich, founder of smart EQ, an organisational development consultancy based in South Africa, comments that 'we need to be careful about segmenting people, because in my view, as learning professionals, we need to create the context and optimal conditions where everybody can learn in a way that works for them. Multi-generational workplaces are a reality and strategic organisation design needs to ensure that all generations are able to work and leverage each other's strengths and experiences.' ■

**Career motivations are different and personal goals are no longer as fixed at the start of a career journey as they once were.**

**1.3 FLEXIBILITY IN CAREERS**

As individuals, we are increasingly adopting more flexible career paths. We are moving from the traditional, so called 'ladder' path to a more dynamic path where we increasingly make career choices aligned to our personal growth agendas (Figure 1.5).

Miranda Smith, of accountancy practice Mazars in the UK, reflects on the shorter tenure in each role of those entering work today. 'I think it's easier to have the attitude to jump ship and that's now acceptable; people do stay in roles for [only] two or three years, whereas a number of years ago, it wasn't as acceptable.'

The transition to these more flexible careers creates challenges for the learning community in appropriately addressing the available progressions in various organisations. But it also emphasises the individual's role in sustaining their own development path through verifiable skills – perhaps with

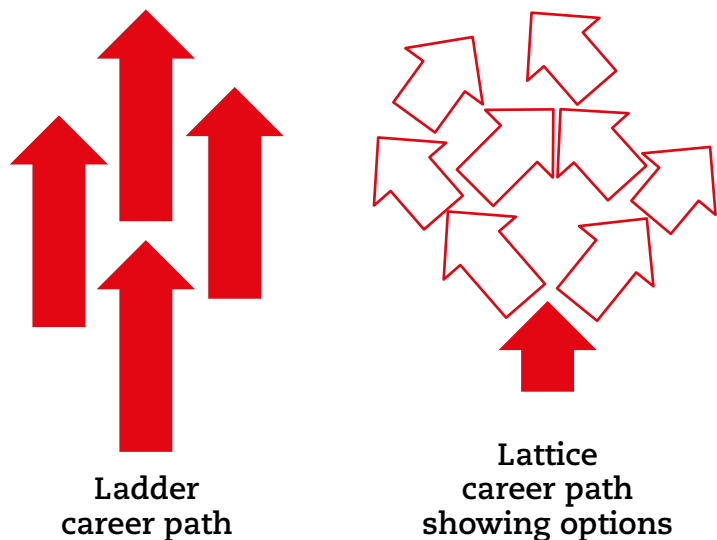
the use of micro-qualifications and 'badges' (ie verifiable digital awards). We need to ensure that, as individuals, we are able to demonstrate our abilities to potential employers.

Nonetheless, ticking a box to say that you have completed a course, or have passed a test, does not necessarily equate to appreciating the topic concerned, or to demonstrating the capability that should underpin it. We need to be able to 'trust' the statement of competence. The importance of the personal brand, backed by verifiable skills, is essential in the lattice career.

Old assumptions about staying with an organisation for the long term, and aspiring to be the finance leader or the firm partner, are no longer valid. Career motivations are different and personal goals are no longer as fixed at the start of a career journey as they once were.

For generations who are already in the workplace adapting to this model is challenging.

**FIGURE 1.5:** Ladder and lattice career pathways



Source: ACCA

Career paths are fast moving and are far more individual than ever before: so is, or should be, our approach to learning and development.

#### 1.4 THE GROWTH OF SELF-CURATED LEARNING

Many older workers have sustained careers in a world where learning took place at a time and place that fitted into a cycle. In the past, they were happy to wait for the course to come around and trusted the employer that it was the right one for their career development journey. No longer does that suffice. Career paths are fast moving and are far more individual than ever before: so is, or should be, our approach to learning and development.

There are now an increasing number of learning options available to the individual. Phil Horton, client director from next generation e-learning experts Brightwave Group, notes that the application of technology in learning has made the acquisition of new knowledge and skills far more accessible than ever before, while at the same time, such volume and diversity are making poor and irrelevant content less and less tolerable for learners.

This range will probably continue to increase as technology offers additional modes of training.

##### Different learning preferences

We do not all learn in the same way. We have different learning needs and styles and to assume that there is one common path is not appropriate.

Alan Mumford and Peter Honey considered these in *The Learning Styles Questionnaire* (1995). Good learning interventions are developed in such a way as to appeal to a range of learning styles, bearing in mind that these are only biases in the way that we learn and not distinct differences between individuals.

The fact that we learn from experiences is underlined by the work of Lombardo and Eichinger (1996), who have created their own model of how we learn. They based the following analysis of how we learn in our professional lives on survey results:

- 70% from challenging assignments
- 20% from developmental relationships
- 10% from coursework and training.

The authors point out, however, that this model is not prescriptive, nor is it a model that seeks to show the best way that people learn. It is a reminder of the influence of experience on the way we develop and therefore the importance of on-the-job experiences in our development.

Paul Matthews, CEO and founder of People Alchemy in the UK, comments that 'Informal learning is at the same time immensely strong and incredibly fragile. Strong, because it is built into our "DNA" from millennia of learning by doing and learning by socialisation. Fragile, because it is natural and does not function when it is managed and made "formal". The immense power of informal learning can be harnessed, but it must be done gently with an understanding of its nature. You might think of it [as being] like the sailor and the sailboat. The sailor must understand the wind and the currents and cooperate with these to get the best from the sailboat. Sailors talk of a light hand on the tiller and a feel for the ocean, and they know the quickest path between two points is not [necessarily] a straight line. Pointing the sailboat in the direction you want to go and insisting the boat moves only in that direction will seldom work. The tactics for navigating the winds and currents of informal learning will vary from organisation to organisation, but the skill is always to work with the forces at play, not against them.'

Participating in ACCA's Future Leaders roundtable in Romania, and discussing training academies, many participants argued, for instance, that the classroom setting still offers a lot of value. As one person said: 'every day when we are coming to the classes, whatever the learning provider or training, we just come in the morning and develop an idea and we are talking; we are thinking together and this human interaction, from my perspective, is more important than just talking to a computer.'

This perspective was shared by other roundtable participants, regardless of their age; as one young professional put it: 'Quite contrary to the expectations when thinking about my age I'm not a huge fan of the online learning. I definitely appreciated the classes held by our internal training academy and I especially valued the tutor.'

The value of on-the-job learning is of clear importance to the survey respondents.

Many young members and students participating in our discussion in Dubai also agreed to the importance of classroom learning. One said that ‘finding a study buddy was one of the best [pieces of] advice [she] received’ while another one added that: ‘the best benefit of attending a class is that it gives you a sense of [a] structured learning process. And to me personally, I have a commitment issue when it comes to learning’.

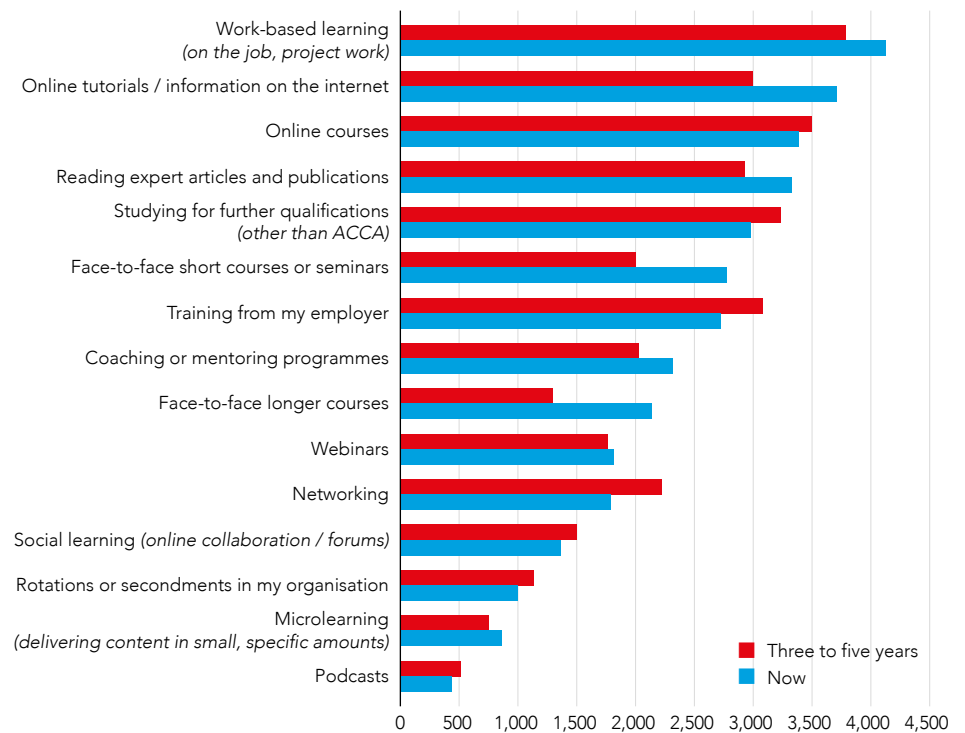
In Delhi, one participant even linked that to cost-saving as he said that: ‘if I am studying with a person who is also studying the same subject and we discuss it, we find out more ways to do the same thing, we find out different perspectives. So basically our knowledge multiplies; and from the organisation perspective, it saves costs’.

Other learners around the world have different views; as one said: ‘I can’t really focus eight hours straight, three days in a row. And it’s a static curriculum and I can’t really follow that. I’m a person that gets bored fast. So for me I prefer something self-paced and mostly online.’

Learning on-the-go is particularly valued for those who are working and studying at the same time but may not get the opportunity to attend a scheduled course at a scheduled time: ‘I don’t get time off from my employer to study so classroom learning is not an option; I am spending at least 40 minutes in traffic from home to work so I put a podcast in my car and listen as I go to work, whenever and wherever I want to learn it.’

ACCA consulted both members and students on how they like to learn. The results are presented in Figure 1.6 and Figure 1.7 below.

**FIGURE 1.6:** What learning and development methods do you like / expect to use



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 7,797 and 7,757 respondents respectively. Respondents were asked to select top five.



**In the longer run there is a clear reduction in the preference for face-to-face longer courses.**

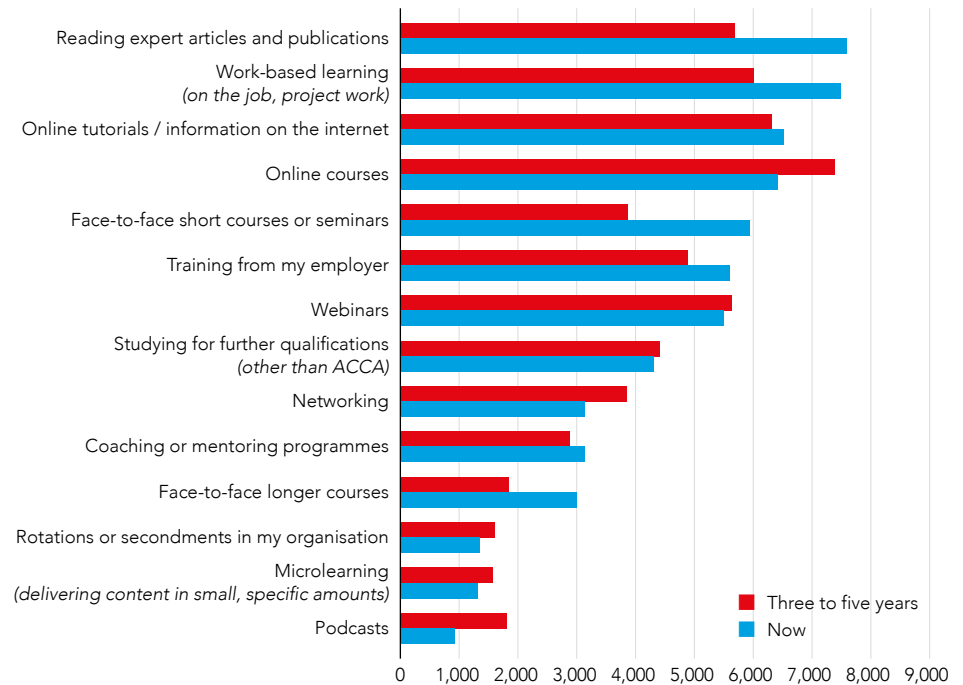
The value of on-the-job learning is of clear importance to the survey respondents. The students differ from ACCA members in their view of the relevance of additional qualifications, which may in part be ascribed to a closer focus, by those entering the workplace, on qualifications as a mechanism by which they can demonstrate skills in the lattice career model and seek new opportunities. Career flexibility was an aspiration that many students expressed in the roundtable discussions.

In our socially mobile age, the level of respondents choosing rotations and secondments within an organisation contrasts with the 25% who advocated this in the survey carried out for ACCA's *Professional Accountants – the future: Generation Next* report (2016b). This may reflect the self-motivated mobility of the student population as

well as the inherent challenges for larger and smaller organisations in delivering these programmes.

In the longer run there is a clear reduction in the preference for face-to-face longer courses. Only 12% of the members selected them as a method that they currently use (and only 8% of those surveyed indicated that they thought they would still include them in their top five preferences in three to five years). In comparison, the numbers for shorter courses of this form were 44% for members using them currently and 26% for members expecting to do so in three to five years. We should not ignore the effectiveness of these programmes in creating performance change but as careers progress and time constraints inevitably increase, it is perhaps unsurprising that the preference for this form of learning has decreased.

**FIGURE 1.7:** What learning and development methods do you like / expect to use – members, students and affiliates



Source: Combined results of ACCA student survey July 2018, 7,797 and 7,757 respondents respectively and ACCA Members' CPD Survey 7,173 and 7,155 respondents respectively; total populations 14,970 and 14,914 for now and three to five years respectively. Respondents were asked to select top 5.

**Note:** Social learning was omitted from the ACCA Members' survey and hence is excluded from the comparison chart.

**Learning will be more and more the responsibility of individuals as a result of more fragmented and more diverse career structures.**

The preference for online programmes suggests that this form of learning is one that will continue to expand (43% of members surveyed gave these as a 'top five' preference now and 55% predicted that they would be preferred in three to five years; in comparison, the numbers for students are 44% and 45% respectively).

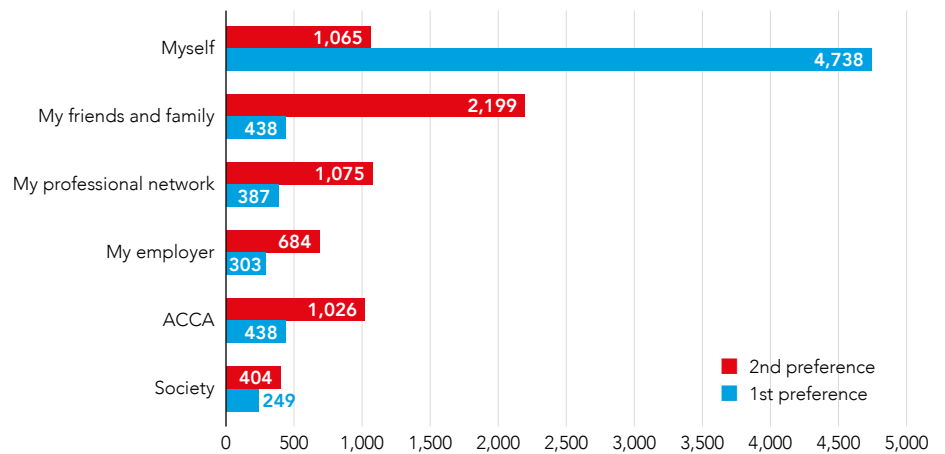
The contrast in the preferences for coaching and mentoring between members (11% selected it as one of their 'top five') and students (30%) reflects the impact that can be made by these interventions in the earlier stages of careers. In many of the roundtables the students expressed a desire to be mentored by more experienced professionals as the impact of the lattice careers model left them confused about the correct career choices to make.

A geographical analysis of the survey responses suggested a fairly uniform pattern, although in China 66% of the students who responded expressed a preference for online courses (compared with 38% for India and 29% for both the UK and Ireland) while social learning was a preference for 31% in China (compared with 18% in India and 8% in each of the UK and Ireland).

ACCA also asked the students who encouraged them to learn (Figure 1.8).

Increasing our skills becomes ever more important in navigating change and building successful careers. Learning will be more and more the responsibility of individuals as a result of more fragmented and more diverse career structures. Employers have a vested interest, however, in providing an environment in which employees can develop because this will support improving their performance.

**FIGURE 1.8:** Who gives you incentives to learn and develop? – Students



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 6,900 respondents

As the technological and social changes continue to affect our profession, so there is an increasing emphasis on the broadening of skills that the accountant needs.

**1.5 WHY DOES GROWTH MATTER IN THIS PROFESSION?**

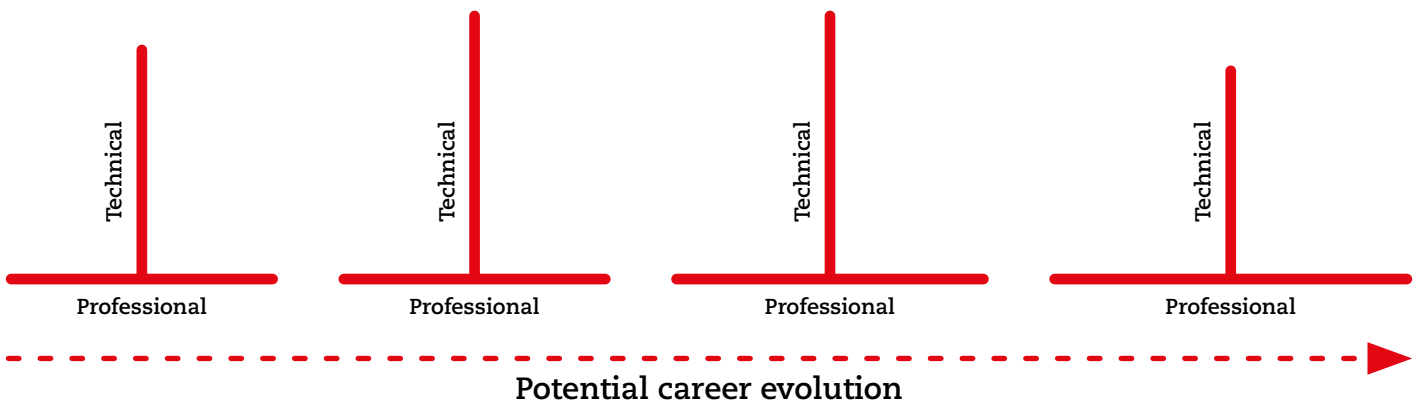
As the technological and social changes continue to affect our profession, so there is an increasing emphasis on the broadening of skills that the accountant needs. Yet the roles that finance professionals perform increasingly require both a degree of specialism, which we can expect to develop as a career progresses, and a broad range of softer skills, which we also expect to grow, in line with each career.

In *The Finance Professional in 2020*, ACCA (2006) introduced the concept of the 'T-shaped' professional as represented by the breadth and depth of their skills (Figure 1.9). The current trends reflected in the interviews and roundtables illustrate the concept.

In Figure 1.9 we suggest a potential development path for an individual. As they start their careers they have both professional<sup>2</sup> and technical skills of a certain level. As their job roles progress they may, initially, need to develop deeper technical skills which in time are balanced by further professional skills. At a more senior level in the organisation they place greater reliance on the technical skills of others so the professional skills acquire increased emphasis.

With any of these components of skill growth, be they technical or softer skills, we all have a personal journey that is contextualised by the role that we perform, or expect to perform, and the current level of performance.

**FIGURE 1.9:** T-shaped professional



Source: ACCA

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this illustration, the professional (also referred to as 'soft') skills include the experience, intelligence, emotional intelligence, creative and vision quotients.



## 2. Preparing for change

The pace of change that we are experiencing in the profession is increasing and as individuals we need to be able to respond to that and to recognise the importance of sustaining our personal growth. While the role of the accountant remains potentially attractive in society, it is a role that increasingly changes and adapts. Lifelong adaptation is critical to survival.

### 2.1 OPENNESS TO DEVELOPMENT: CONTINUOUS LEARNING IS A MINDSET

Although the concept of continuously updating practice and adopting new standards has always been central to the profession, and underlies both professional accreditation and the provision of quality assurance to customers, clients and businesses, professional accountants today must be prepared to learn other skills, more often, if they are to remain relevant.

In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck (2006) explores the concepts of 'fixed' and 'growth' mindsets in individuals. Those with a fixed mindset

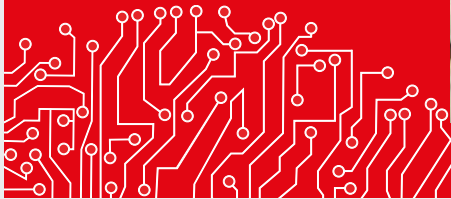
consider that their success is based on innate ability while those with a growth mindset believe that their progression is based on hard work, learning and determination. She notes that 'In a fixed mindset, students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it'. In the workplace we therefore need to

recognise the different developmental preferences of individuals and their personal motivations for growth.

At the individual's level, as Sally-Anne Blanshard comments in our Australian employers' roundtable, 'there's a theme of being open to learning as well. If you are closed to learning, then that's going to be a quite career limiting attitude'.

The key to accepting this is the mindset of personal growth that we need to adopt and encourage in others. Personal growth is about maintaining and updating the skills that you need to undertake both your current role and the next role that you might have along your career path.

How well prepared are students for the world of work and the need for continuous learning?



**As our careers develop we grow and we change. We may change emphasis in the work that we do; we may be more radical and change career direction. Either way, our careers are generally evolving and we are rewarded by new experiences.**

This openness to learning needs to be reflected from the start of our careers. Sally-Anne Blanshard explored, in the same roundtable, the challenge of adopting the continuous learning mindset in the graduate population: '[University graduates] are looking for more solid structured training like they would have got in a university environment and when they get into the workplace, it's more flexible, it's agile, it's much more about the relationships you form, than it is about sometimes the book learning that you would have got from a university perspective. There is a gap between university and the workforce on getting the universities to actually skill people in a way that transitions them into the workforce a lot better. That's a real struggle'.

Peter Ellington and Amanda Williams (2017) discuss the tensions between the student and the profession in their paper on accounting academics' perceptions of the effect of accreditation on UK accounting degrees.

ACCA's roundtables with universities and other learning institutions reflected the challenge of fulfilling a desire to ensure that their students are prepared for the evolving workplace while also addressing the desire of the student to obtain a degree that achieves the highest grade possible in order that they can obtain a job. This challenge is one that is increasingly difficult to address.

Similar perceptions were identified in the other roundtables. In Karachi, while one of the participating learning providers deplored how students were often too exam-focused and were not thinking about those other skills required in their future job, eg how to address or convince an

audience, another one suggested perhaps these skills should be as much part of the examination as more technical areas.

In Romania, contributing learning providers also recognised this behaviour and argued that it was perhaps easier to teach those already working or with work experience: 'because they are working with that information, they are really interested in knowing how to solve that issue and how to obtain extra information, making better connection[s] because they have the practice in the office and they just put the missing pieces of the puzzle [together] using the knowledge they get from studying towards their qualification'.

For Ronnie Patton, senior lecturer in professional accounting practice at Ulster University in Northern Ireland, the sole focus on purely passing exams is worrying for two reasons: 'the first is that the focus is on satisficing – or mediocrity, not excellence. The second is that it reduces learning to a process, defined by an end point. To put that another way, learning becomes functional and the focus is simply to pass. With regard to members, this ethos has implications for how we view CPD, by moving the focus from compliance (demonstrating that a certain number of hours have been completed) to the intended purpose – development'.

Ronnie concludes that, 'for any qualification, CPD requirements and self-curated learning, these must be based on outcomes and recognise [that] the purpose of learning as [acquiring] knowledge only has currency when it can be applied'.

Other learning providers, such as Phoenix in the UAE, have seized the opportunity to bridge the employability gap by adding a recruitment arm to their business, helping students find internships or placements and providing training and coaching for CV writing or presentation skills. The formula has proved fairly viable as employers are now coming directly to the learning provider to recruit young talent. ■

There is a clear tension between the employer and the employee as to who drives the process of development and for whose benefit it is undertaken.

## 2.2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE?

In the ecosystem of workplace learning for the accountancy profession (Figure 2.1), there are three key players: the individual, the employer (as represented by the manager and the L&D team) and the professional body. In certain circumstances, and for certain areas, the regulators and/or government bodies also play a role.

Each of these players needs to be clear in their role in the learning framework of the future. Success in career development across the profession requires this.

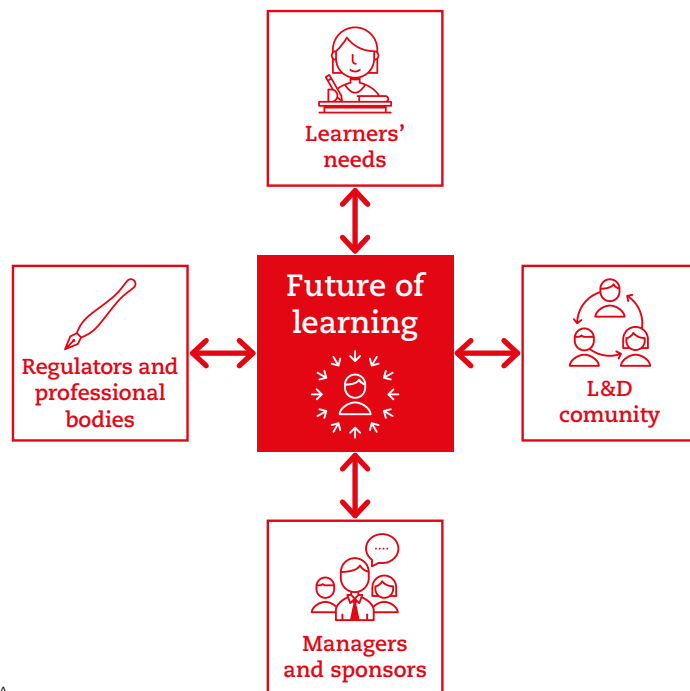
### A clear tension

In the evolving economy, we need to reappraise who is driving the learning process. There is a clear tension between the employer and the employee as to who drives the process of development and for whose benefit it is undertaken.

In the UK, for instance, employers represented at ACCA's roundtables argued that sometimes organisations see encouraging training and development as potentially giving a way out for employees. Some thus suggested that staff should commit to giving back to employers, by staying in their role for an agreed amount of time, for example, a view that was shared by many others across the roundtables ACCA hosted globally. In Hong Kong, one simply stated that, being an accountant, 'if I invest in someone, I want to see return on investment' (Figure 2.2).

Greg Owens, global assurance director at BDO, noted: 'Clients expect a lot more from accounting professionals so we each have a responsibility to be "up to speed" by maintaining and further developing our IT knowledge and awareness of technology innovation. Technology is driving change right across business so whether people are meeting with audit

FIGURE 2.1: The learning ecosystem



Source: ACCA

**Learning is about performance growth – growth of the individual and growth of the organisation.**

committees or working with existing client contacts – there’s an expectation that each of us as a “professional” is able to apply our IT knowledge alongside our other technical and communication skills. Ongoing learning about technology through CPD also helps us to decide “who” to involve (whether experts or other colleagues) and “when” – particularly in more complex technology situations’.

Many learners, however, see the issue of time as the main constraint on their development. Across the roundtables around the world, many argued that employers should provide the environment and relevant opportunities for employees to develop, mapping learning outcomes to career progression.

In some cases, some learners even claimed that their line managers were actually trying to undermine their development by hiding opportunities because they fear employees will become better than them.

**Investing in people: balancing the incentives**

Across the students’ and members’ roundtables held around the world for the purpose of this study, a recurring debate concerned the role of incentives in learning and whether employee development should be encouraged with some sort of reward, whether financial or non-financial.

ACCA has long explored the role of financial incentives in driving behaviour, concluding that ‘incentive pay is a good principle, the challenge is to ensure it gives incentives to the right behaviour’ (ACCA 2010: page 17). In a further research paper on culture and corporate behaviour, ACCA discussed the potential trade-off between rewarding behaviour and dealing with the unintended consequences of such incentives, highlighting how in some cases individuals resort to ‘gaming’ measures or come up with measures they can easily achieve, so as to tick the box quickly and obtain the attached reward (ACCA 2014).

Learning is about performance growth – growth of the individual and growth of the organisation. In many instances employers look too much at the corporate objective and fail to align it to ways of working. Employers need to ensure that the learning that they offer individuals motivates them appropriately and ensures that they achieve the desired outcome to their own satisfaction. If the profession is to continue to develop, the approach to learning in the workplace needs to be one that focuses on assisting the individual to achieve the performance improvement that both employer and employee are seeking for the achievement of specific goals.

**FIGURE 2.2:** The employer and the employee



Source: ACCA

**52%**  
 indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of the learning that they currently received from their employer

**State of workplace learning**

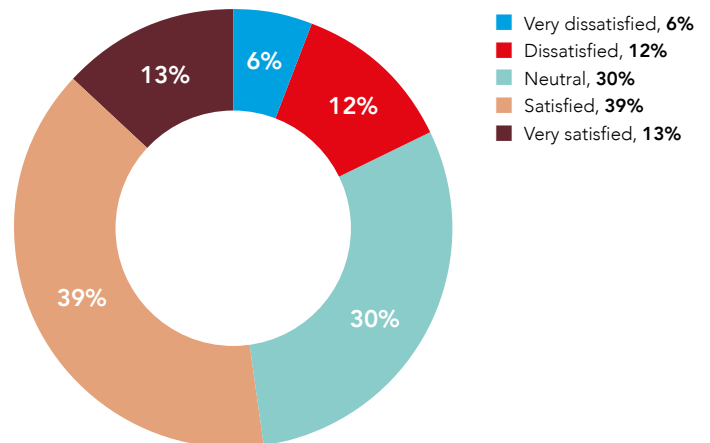
ACCA asked students for their views on the quality of the learning that they currently received from their employer (Figure 2.3). A proportion (52%) indicated that they were satisfied with the quality. This is not a reason for complacency; it shows that there is room for improvement.

We asked those who were not satisfied to indicate their reasons for this from a range of choices (Figure 2.4).

**2.3 BUILDING A CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS LEARNING**

As many said, across ACCA's research, embracing continuous learning requires both a certain mindset and, probably, a kind of paradigm shift for many. As our roundtable in Mumbai (India) exemplified, however, there are practical steps organisations can take to embed such a mindset. For instance, one employer suggested that businesses should improve how they tie their learning strategy to their company strategy, saying: 'I firmly believe that unless individuals grow, teams will not grow; and unless teams grow, organisations will not grow; growth is the tangible outcome of learning'.

**FIGURE 2.3:** How satisfied are you with the current quality of learning you receive from your employer to undertake your role?



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 4,677 respondents

**FIGURE 2.4:** Please could you indicate why you are not satisfied?



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 2,228 respondents



**Organisations need to ensure that they foster a culture of openness to developing.**

One participant in the roundtable held in Shanghai related this debate to ancient Asian philosophy; for him, learners 'eventually need to be wanting to learn out of their own initiative. So as employers, or as leaders, we need to be able to encourage our employees to take the initiative'.

Such advice found an echo in our employer roundtable in Romania too, where head of Finance Samsung Shared Services Centre Europe, Eduard Grigore described how 'staff are committed. If you are asking them to make a plan, you will get a plan. They will put effort by day, by tasks, but when it's about actions, only few which are really organised and consistent in taking them in this respect; so the key challenge for employers is to find how we can help them take those fast actions to get consistent results.'

Organisations therefore need to ensure that they foster a culture of openness to developing. Kevin Jones, CFO of Sydney Water, summed up his perspective: 'you actually teach your people to learn rather than teaching them what they need to do to do their job'.

For Christine Olivier of AVADO: 'if you're looking for corporate training to be meaningful, it's essential to have full buy-in from the senior leaders from the start, and for them to help drive internal engagement throughout the learning journey. Comprehensive on-boarding is important, but you also need ongoing motivation, necessary internal support to ensure the application of learning in the workplace and celebration of success at the end to ensure real impact'.



## CASE STUDY: Boots

**At pharmaceutical retailer Boots in the UK, the importance of setting the right tone at the top of the organisation in order to embed a learning culture effectively is well understood.**

In fact, for stores finance manager, Charles Beddington: 'a pivotal event was embracing the fact that learning was for all, no matter what your role was, your age or your length of time at Boots, understanding this brought about a brand new way of thinking about learning'.

Since then, Boots has been holding an annual 'YOUiversity' week in its Nottingham campus, offering the finance team a range of seminars and workshops that are all geared towards preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

The idea was to create a space to learn, while providing content that does not always relate to the job employees perform: for example, talking about well-being, mindfulness or other softer skills-development drivers.

Tapping into people's interest in other areas has proved a successful way of fostering a culture of continuous learning. This was not set up overnight: it took time, effort, resources and commitment to embed and sustain it effectively.

One of the first steps was to identify true advocates or champions within the organisation. For Charles, the best candidates are often those who are either passionate about learning and development, or those who are equally passionate about the area or system they own; for him, those individuals are the best placed to talk about their subject, communicate their passion and coach others.

The critical point, however, is to engage line managers to ensure that initiatives respond to current L&D needs and that teams have the flexibility to attend such events. One way of holding to account those managers responsible for staff development is through performance assessment or confidential surveys to evaluate the level of support employees believe they get from their supervisor.

For Charles, the initiative is undeniably positive. Members of staff are now 'actively stepping forward to help and support the week, as well as attending the learning provided throughout. From a performance point of view, the environment created also allowed for greater awareness and understanding of the business as a whole, helping staff provide a better service whatever their function. ■

For employers, the first responsibility is to ensure that learning is seen as part of the culture of the organisation.

## 2.4 CREATING AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

### The individual

It is important that, as individuals, we appreciate in this evolving world that we have the most fundamental role in ensuring that we are developing in line with our own career goals and with the expectations of our employers about current and future roles.

Maurice Cheong, an ACCA professional in Australia, commented: 'I was thinking to myself that one of the areas that stop one from developing is actually the [in] ability to reflect on your barriers. Like, if you don't know what's stopping you from progressing you will never be able to do that. Sometimes we don't actually stop and take stock of what we need in our lives or in our careers. So, it's quite important for us to do that and realise what are the barriers.'

Cormac Power, an ACCA professional in Canada, added: 'Ultimately it's your own responsibility, to be honest. You can always blame other people, but you are the one who has to take on the extra workload yourself.'

### Employers

For employers, the first responsibility is to ensure that learning is seen as part of the culture of the organisation. The encouragement of growth, in whatever field, is important as it helps to promote the personal journey.

To this end, the learning strategy should be part of your overall business strategy. Ever increasingly, the skills of the individuals in your organisation will be the differentiator between you and a competitor. The need to be agile and nimble in the talent pool is essential.



## CASE STUDY: Safaricom – developing a culture of learning

### Building an effective learning culture in organisations also requires an element of reward or recognition as part of a concerted effort to sustain engagement.

Safaricom, one of the largest mobile network operators in Kenya, is a good example. While in the process of setting up its own corporate university, the tech firm is already hosting an annual graduation ceremony at which the company CEO recognises top learners across the organisation – ie those who have engaged the most with eLearning material and successfully completed specific courses. During the celebration, winners are given learning vouchers that they can use as school fees in partner institutions.

Speaking in one of ACCA's roundtables, held in Nairobi, the firm's talent, capability and acquisition manager, Francis Ngari, recalled being one of the first to take part in the competition and win a learning voucher: 'what I did with

mine is I registered for international human resources management courses, and while previously I was not thinking about human resources (HR), this is actually how my HR journey started. And here I am today!'

One of the Safaricom's culture 'pillars' promotes growth of self, teams and the business. By fostering a culture of self-paced and continuous learning, Francis sees the impact of learning, unlearning and relearning as a critical success factor in driving sustainable engagement with staff in the current and future world of work.

As Safaricom moves towards becoming an agile, digital organisation, the company is now building capability by tapping into its pool of top agile learners to ensure that it remains ahead of expected changes and fit for future. For Francis, this is definitely an effective way of keeping staff motivated, creating role models for a continuous learning culture. ■

**Overall, it is important that L&D teams provide guidance to line managers in ensuring that learning programmes are aligned to strategic goals.**

Employers have tended to offer learning curriculums that are extensive and often not linked to the performance needs of their employees. Learning is a necessary precursor to future strategy execution. They need to be paying attention to today where learning needs to be done for more current and tactical reasons. This is the continuum between just-in-case we need it in the future to we need it right now which is more about performance support.

It is notable that people talk about performance support as learning. It is not, although people might learn as a secondary benefit. Performance support is about supporting performance. As a learner I might learn something for long enough to transfer it from the support material, perhaps on screen, to my point of work a few minutes later. But then I forget it. The question for the employer, the learner and the L&D team is whether this is learning? The learner may well have got the job done. They may know where to find it next time. But it is not learning. It is looking up the manual or guide.

What I do need to learn is where to find the manual or guide and how to navigate it, and one of L&D's jobs is to make sure I can do that and make sure the guide or support system is easily accessible and easily navigable given my needs as a worker.

There is a balance for the employer to achieve between investment in the development of the individual against the time spent adding value to clients. In this changing world there is a need to optimise the effort, both financial and time, on the right activities for the right performance needs.

#### **Learning and development professionals**

For L&D teams the challenge can be perceived as greater than in the past. From being the providers of training programmes that encompass the end-to-end career of the individual, they are increasingly becoming the custodians of curated content. With learners looking increasingly outside the traditional confines of employer-provided content and programmes, L&D teams need to understand their role in providing this within the corporate environment and how their traditional programmes can assist in this.

Overall, it is important that L&D teams provide guidance to line managers in ensuring that learning programmes are aligned to strategic goals. The greatest challenge is convincing organisational leaders that the more traditional ways of learning (such as classroom-based programmes) are no longer the only way to learn.

The professional body provides a level of constancy in the changing world. Among its members, and in the broader community, it occupies a position of trust.

**Professional bodies**

The professional body provides a level of constancy in the changing world. Through continuing development programmes linked to skill growth, and by providing insights into technical issues, it occupies a space of relevance in the learning ecosystem. Among its members, and in the broader community, it occupies a position of trust.

In ACCA's surveys of students and members the researchers asked who they saw as their provider of learning (Figure 2.5).

**Regulators and governments**

Many learning interventions are driven by the needs of regulators and/or government bodies. All too often, these learning interventions are perceived as being of poor quality and little direct benefit.

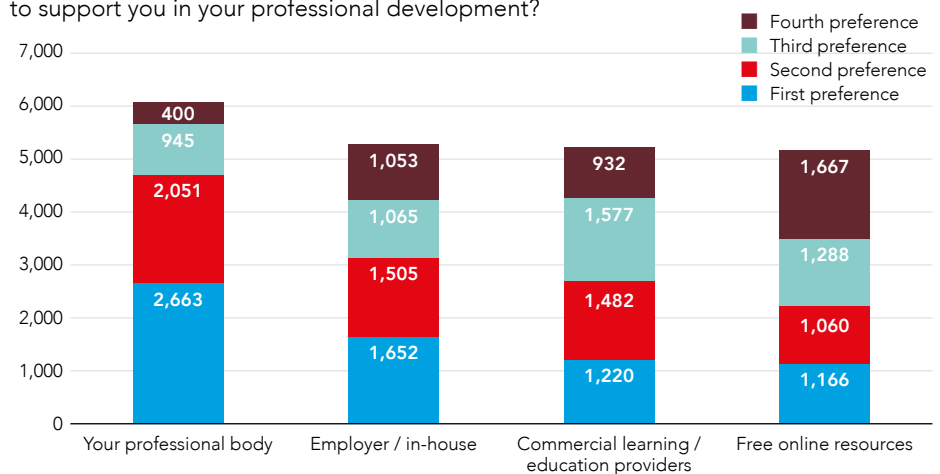
At government level, the implications of the changing world of work also mean that more attention and resources may have to be deployed nationally to ensure that countries' populations are equipped to face those changes – ignoring such trends eventually poses the threat that governments will have to deal with huge rises in unemployment and associated public expenses.

In ACCA's roundtable in Delhi, one participant talked about the example of Singapore and what its then prime minister had declared on the day of the country's independence back in 1966; 'he said "my fellows, we don't have any natural resources. We don't have any funds, and we are a very small country, and the only resource I have is you people. So, I want you people to develop yourself and develop Singapore", and you can see the results in just 50 years'.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is keeping track of governments' spending and commitment to developing people in its Global Human Capital Index. In its 2017 results, the WEF concludes that 'the leaders of the Index are generally economies with a longstanding commitment to their people's educational attainment. Unsurprisingly, they are mainly today's high-income economies. Creating a virtuous cycle of this nature should be the aim of all countries' (WEF 2017).

Having determined where performance gaps occur and understood the career path that individuals wishes to take, it is now time to explore the range of opportunities that are available to address their needs.

**FIGURE 2.5:** Thinking about your future career, who do you think would be best placed to support you in your professional development?



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018, 6,703 respondents

# 3. The future workplace learning landscape



Given the inevitable cost pressures on an organisation, employers need to make sure that when they invest in the development of an individual they do so in a manner that is going to achieve the performance results that they desire. They need to be selective and focused in the choices that they make.

### 3.1 CONSTANT FACTORS AND BASICS

#### Experiential learning is still seen as most effective

In the discussion about the importance of understanding the learner's needs and the importance of the culture of the organisation in supporting growth, we should not forget that we have not fundamentally changed the way that we learn as individuals.

Moreover, as one participant said at ACCA's Malaysian roundtable, if we are talking about the future of learning, 'there is also a very rich past of learning', particularly a breadth of knowledge in Asian cultures about leadership attributes or Feng Shui.

We now understand more about the psychology of learning, and it is important to recognise that we learn by experience and reflection.

David A. Kolb's book, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* essentially explores the principle that a person learns through discovery and experience (Kolb 1984). It provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multi-linear model of adult development, both of

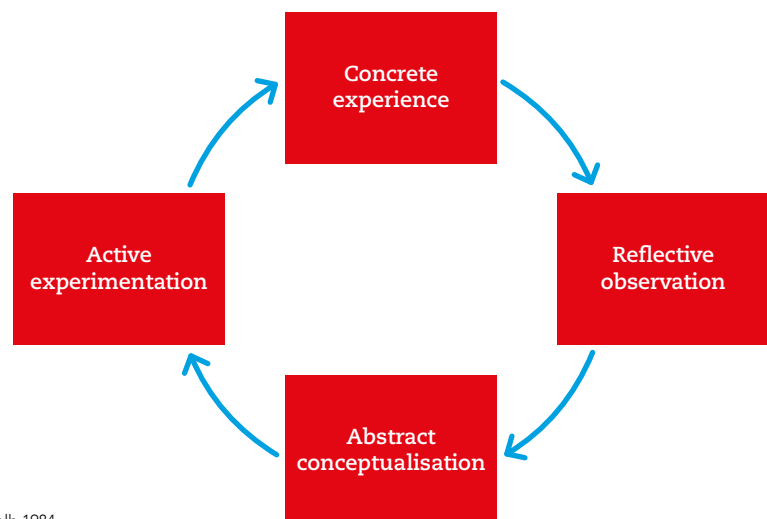
which are consistent with what is known about how we naturally learn, grow, and develop (Figure 3.1).

The model reminds us that for any learning activity to be successful we need to internalise and form our own rules, which we then apply, modify and reevaluate. Employers can only achieve successful learning interventions if by supporting

this process through the relevance of the learning experience in the workplace.

As Sally-Anne Blanshard comments, in the Australian employers' roundtable, 'learning experience through storytelling and sharing actually gives people the opportunity to learn through others and learn from their mistakes and also learn in that environment where it's safe to make a mistake'.

FIGURE 3.1: Kolb's learning cycle



Source: Kolb 1984

Applying techniques such as Design Thinking will significantly help in improving the quality of learning, especially in the corporate environment.

We forget, sometimes, in this technologically connected world, that the greatest learning experiences come from the interactions with others and from the ability to 'do – review – learn', as exemplified by Kolb's experiential cycle (Figure 3.1).

Wherever a team member is undertaking a learning experience, the effective manager must ensure that they have support in internalising and applying that learning.

**Quality of learning design is critical**

The design of learning interventions has moved a considerable way from the slide-based presentations of the past. Quality design can now personalise the learner's journey, for example through a cherry-picked selection of e-learning

modules and supporting content. It can include gaming to make the learner competitive and enthused in their learning journey. Phil Horton of Brightwave Group highlighted the importance of empathy as a tool in learning design, to make the learner engage with the learning on a deeper level and embed new, positive workplace behaviours.

Applying techniques such as Design Thinking (the iterative process in which we seek to understand the user, challenge assumptions, and redefine problems in an attempt to identify alternative strategies and solutions that might not be instantly apparent with our initial level of understanding) will significantly help in improving the quality of learning, especially in the corporate environment.



Design Thinking – evolving instructional design

**Design Thinking is a human-centred design approach that brings three valuable aspects to the learning experience:**

- placing human beings at the centre and going to great lengths, using empathy, to understand people's emotional needs, beyond simply identifying technical competency gaps and business goals
- exercising the liberty to reframe a given problem, rather than taking the initial request as an order: 'Develop a new course for mid-level accountancy professionals' may need to be reframed as 'How might we prepare mid-level accountancy professionals for their changing roles?'
- using experimentation and prototypes to get direct feedback from users, making failure cheap, early and forward.

Source: Tianhui (Nina) Grosse, head of Talent Development and Organizational Capability (for EMEA and Canada), Takeda Pharmaceuticals International AG

A mentoring relationship is a longer-term one, while coaching relates to guiding the learner through the performance of a specific task or activity.

### Coaching and mentoring: a distinction

The Oxford Living Dictionaries (2018) offer the following two definitions, which provide a distinction between a mentor and a coach:

- coach – an instructor or trainer (in sport)
- mentor – an experienced and trusted adviser.

This is a subtle, yet important distinction between the two. A mentoring relationship is a longer-term one, while coaching relates to guiding the learner through the performance of a specific task or activity.

A participant in the Mumbai (India) workshop commented: 'not everybody is a good mentor or coach. Mentoring ability comes from experience while coaching is a skill set to be developed; organisations could train coaches within staff' .

Speaking about the value of coaching, Miranda Smith of Mazars in the UK reflected on her experiences and the messages that she hears about today's working environment. 'When I was an auditor I did not learn solely from training courses, but also from my seniors and managers; from sitting down and talking to people. You weren't afraid to cut your teeth on something. You knew that you may make a mistake, but your seniors would go through it with you. When we're speaking to teams, that doesn't appear to happen as much anymore. This is something that we're going to be working on moving forward, and how we can improve that.'

In light of all the learning interventions available and the challenges of changing career paths, ACCA's roundtables of students and employers reiterated very strongly the importance of coaching and mentoring in the profession. The impact of longer-term guidance, especially from older members of the profession in assisting younger ones to assess their career choices is of critical value<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ACCA has recently launched a pilot scheme in six countries/regions (Hong Kong, Ireland, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and UK) for members and affiliates to sign up as either mentors or mentees. Details of the programme can be accessed at <https://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/member/mentoring.html>

The impact of longer-term guidance, especially from older members of the profession in assisting younger ones to assess their career choices is of critical value.



## CASE STUDY: Alan Johnson and Kirsty Meldrum

### Alan Johnson, member of ACCA and of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) Board

Very early in my Unilever career I was fortunate to be mentored by a senior finance leader. The guidance and support I received helped me in making early career choices that I benefited from over the years.

I have always taken every opportunity to mentor younger colleagues in the profession, as it is a pleasure to share my own personal experiences. As a mentor I do not believe I am there to provide the answers. My role is to help mentees develop scenarios and explore options. Mentoring provides a 'safe space' to discuss issues, personal challenges, and even difficult situations at work, which might be impossible to discuss at home or with work colleagues.

In late 2016 I first met Kirsty at the International Federation of Accountants Council meeting in Brasilia. Kirsty had been chosen as ACCA's 'Young Ambassador' and was invited to participate in the Council meeting and other related events. During our subsequent discussion, Kirsty asked me for some advice, and this turned into an informal mentoring relationship. During this process I have learnt a lot about the issues that matter most to the upcoming generation of finance professionals. In many ways I have probably got more out of it than Kirsty has! It has helped me understand how Kirsty's generation approach career choices, the importance of a good work-life balance, something that was not considered important in the early period of my career. As a member of the IFAC board, understanding the expectations of our future finance leaders is critical, and this mentoring relationship has made me think about what our profession needs to continue to do in order to attract and retain the best talent, thus ensuring we remain relevant to the broader society.

### Kirsty Meldrum, Santander Global Corporate Banking

Throughout my career in the banking industry, I have always placed significant weight on the importance of a mentor. Sometimes I have formally asked someone to be my mentor; other times it has naturally evolved and we 'check in' with each other when needed. I met Alan in 2016 and the mentoring set-up formed easily thereafter. I find it invaluable having an objective, knowledgeable viewpoint outside the office; a senior sounding board of sorts to keep me focused and balanced in my career.

Nowadays, no two people have the same career path and that's why, exactly as Alan says, I'm not looking for solutions. Instead I want to learn as much as possible from his experience and introduce a different perspective into my thought process. Alan has provided advice for specific situations at work and more broadly for my career, dipping into his own extensive experience as a finance leader to support his views. However, the notion that mentoring is a one-way dialogue is, to me, outdated; mentoring is multi-dimensional. Alan has also expanded my network in the industry immensely: he helped set up a programme for me in Rwanda volunteering as a financial consultant and he has invited me to speak at the ACCA Accountants for Business Global Forum that he chairs. These are opportunities that do not arise in a typical working day in the office.

As Alan highlights, another benefit of mentoring is its role beyond the individual. It is an organic exchange of information and I have found it a useful platform for sharing my experience as a woman in the profession and as part of the 'millennial' generation. Mentoring therefore acts as a bridge between two professionals at different stages in their career and the benefits of this for ourselves, the workplace and the profession are far-reaching. ■



To serve the learner better, employers therefore need to ensure that they are equipping individuals with the ability to search and evaluate trusted sources.

### 3.2 HOW AND WHEN TO ADDRESS DIFFERENT LEARNING NEEDS

The nature of the society in which we live means that the answer to the 'when' question is ever more often 'here' and 'now'. We look to acquire information and apply it in the moment rather than to wait for the next scheduled opportunity. This gives rise to more flexible forms of learning and a greater variety of options for learning.

From an organisation's perspective, employers need to assess how a learning intervention addresses either shorter-term needs, or longer-term growth. Our shorter-term needs can be addressed by more flexible learning approaches from a variety of sources. Our longer-term growth requires formal planning and structure.

#### Knowledge in the information age

We live in the information age. As a society we are creating ever more data year on year. This data is accessible in many ways and many forms when we want it. We are in a world in which information is sought at the point of need.

Our skill is now one of knowing how to search for information, evaluate sources that we trust and then apply it. As individuals we do not need to commit information to memory as, firstly, we can always search for it again and secondly it may well have changed or additional information may be available to us when we need to apply it again. The rate of evolution of standards is an example of this change dynamic.

To serve the learner better, employers therefore need to ensure that they are equipping individuals with the ability to search and evaluate trusted sources. They need their employees to appreciate, in a business context, which sources are worthy of trust and which to ignore.

As learners ourselves, we should appreciate where we need to invest for benefit. Not everything available free has the appropriate rigour and quality; we need to develop the skills to be able to distinguish 'fake' information, which might come from ill-informed sources, from high-quality information.

Nonetheless, as Anna Brennan of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Ireland also notes, we cannot over rely on this approach. 'I use an analogy of a surgeon so when I'm lying on the table and I'm about to have open heart surgery, am I going to be comfortable if the surgeon takes out the text book to tell him where to put the incision? Everybody needs inherent knowledge (as contrasted to information) for every career and we in our profession are no different in that regard. In a meeting with a client.... you can't be looking up Google or technical reference books.... there is a base level of knowledge which every individual needs'.

There is a need for people to understand fundamentals of knowledge – to know what they don't know (ie be aware of the limits of their knowledge) – but also to have a core base of knowledge upon which additional information can be grounded, allowing them to build using creativity and vision.

#### Learning when we want it

Learning in the workplace has evolved from the predominance of class-based courses of 20 years ago through the application of technology via eLearning modules to on-line resources.

We have a greater expectation that we can learn seamlessly on a variety of devices. While there was considerable discussion about mobile learning the reality is that the learning designed needs to be made available on multiple platforms in such a way that the learner can use more than one for the same piece of learning. This provides challenges for the content developers, yet the societal trend towards switching devices and platforms at will creates requirements that need to be addressed.

Christine Olivier of AVADO says that: 'We need to ensure that content is accessible on all devices, not just being responsive, but truly using a mobile-first approach. Learners need to be able to access content anytime, anywhere via different platforms and devices. If I'm at the office in front of my PC I'll attend my webinar that way, but if I happen to be travelling around somewhere else, I need to have an equally great experience via my mobile phone.'

The evolution of learning technologies is vastly enlarging the marketplace. The varied methods by which effective learning can be provided will continue to evolve.

### 3.3 CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES AND PROVIDERS

Below, we look at some of the changing influences on learning delivery. The evolution of learning technologies is vastly enlarging the marketplace. The varied methods by which effective learning can be provided will continue to evolve.

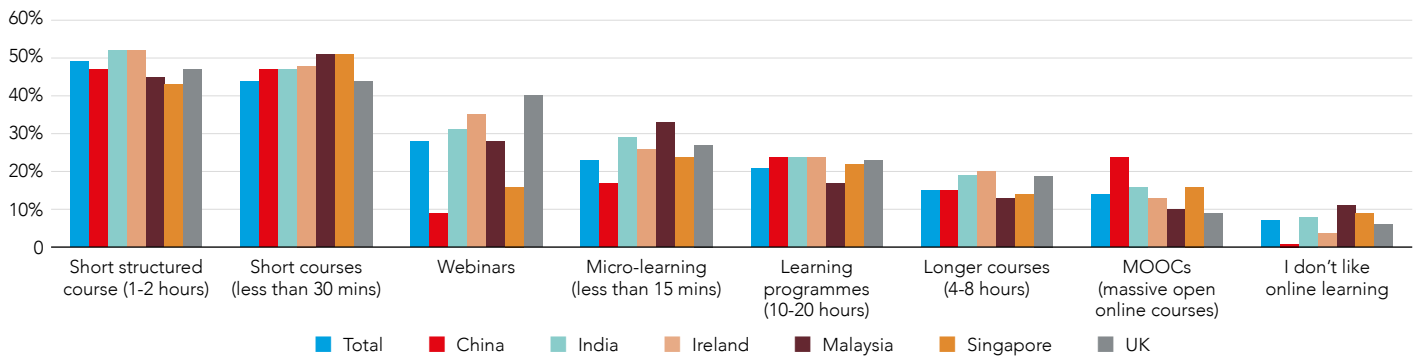
Consequently, there are many new entrants into the learning market. Each offers a solution for one or more of the challenges that learners encounter in developing the appropriate skills.

#### Digital learning

For many people, online learning in varying forms offers a range of development opportunities. Much online content has evolved from the 'page turning' courses previously used into more sophisticated forms of learning.

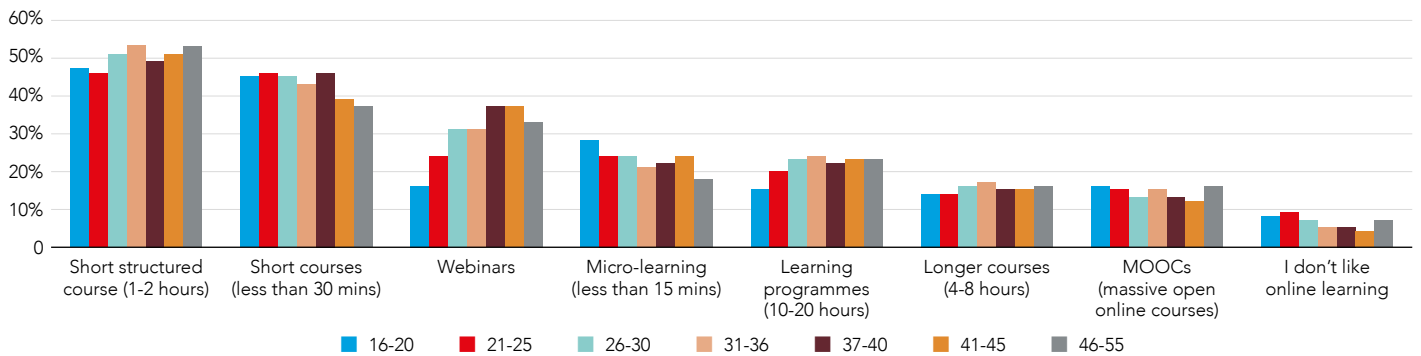
ACCA's student survey explored the attitudes to various forms of online learning across different geographies. Notably, there is an acceptance of the learning format, but learners still prefer longer courses to shorter ones. The analysis was repeated across age bands with the results shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

**FIGURE 3.2:** Thinking a bit more about online learning generally, which of the following do you like to use? (Respondents categorised by geography)



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018

**FIGURE 3.3:** Thinking a bit more about online learning generally, which of the following do you like to use? (Respondents categorised by age group)



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018

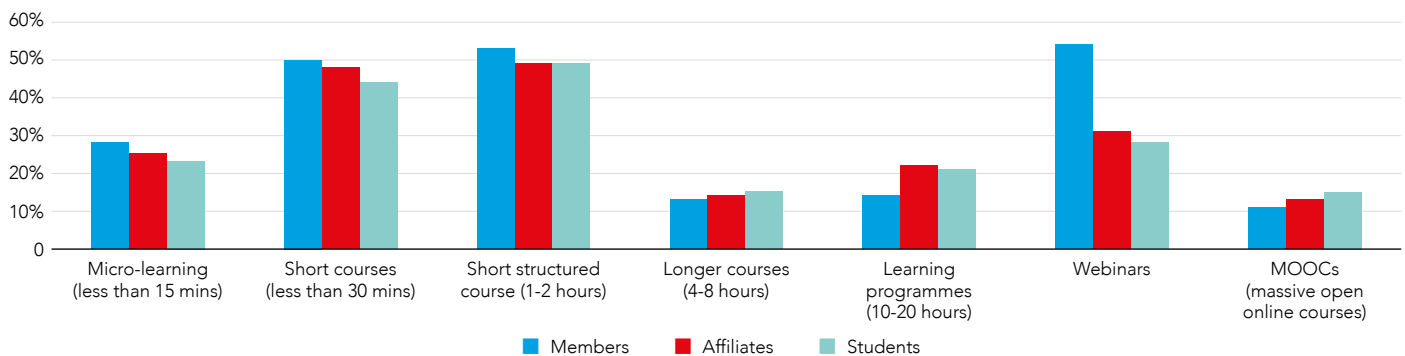
**Notably, there is an acceptance of the learning format, but learners still prefer longer courses to shorter ones.**

The responses should be considered in the context of the question asked on the preferences of the learners in formats of online learning. It does not take into account the performance outcomes that the learners are seeking nor the fit of these formats against the outcomes.

On combining the results from the surveys of ACCA students and members, the picture shown in Figure 3.4 emerges.

Online platforms, such as edX and LinkedIn, offer a range of courses, which can be supported by collaborating with trusted third-party partners and offer ready access to just-in-time learning across a range of topics. Some of these platforms offer certifications of completion, of varying forms, at the end of the programme that can be added to the learner's CV. These platforms have commoditised a range of technical and behavioural content.

**FIGURE 3.4:** Thinking a bit more about online learning generally, which of the following do you like to use? (Combined answers from members, affiliates and students)



Source: ACCA student survey July 2018 – students 6,759 respondents, affiliates 1,098 respondents; ACCA Members CPD survey 7,164 respondents



### Pitfall: the rise of the on-line CV

**Our lives are heavily influenced by social media. We use smartphones to interact on a constant basis and we communicate extensively in that way. We express our career achievements and goals through social media tools and increasingly these tools are used by other to identify us as potential recruits.**

The London roundtable of young undergraduates clearly supported this view. For most of them, placements and internships in large firms are extremely important for their CVs and contribute to building an attractive profile online. Connecting with big brands, listing keywords and badges gained, etc are all seen as helpful in standing out and coming up in search results.

This expression of ability is something that we cannot ignore in our personal learning journey. Yet, how do we know what references to trust? Which ones provide a true validation of experience? Badges represent a mechanism for reflecting continuous learning and, in the portfolio career, a way of accessing the next opportunity. We need to understand how to evaluate these badges so that we can use them to demonstrate the achievement of a level of proficiency.

One UK undergraduate commented: ‘employers were actually not very engaged during our Spring Insights placement; it felt like they were more worried about intake rates rather than the actual experience of recruits’.

Accounting software vendors are also entering the broader education area with accounting awareness courses designed to promote the understanding of the principles behind their software. ■

All too often we forget that we learn more from what we get wrong than by getting it all right and how this is reinforced this back in the workplace.

### Simulation and exploration

One of the key ways that we as individuals learn is by experimenting and refining our experiences. Many courses run by organisations in the past adopted an approach that followed the school classroom style: 'give instruction and people will learn'. This often failed to achieve the desired results, especially in adult learning, as it often provided information without exploring the 'why' of an issue. These courses became known as 'death by PowerPoint' from their over-reliance on slides and the lack of interactivity between the instructor and the learner.

As Anna Brennan of PwC's Audit Learning team in Ireland explains, the first step in the evolution of e-learning was to include simulation and real-life scenarios in the programme.

'In more recent years we've started to get into simulations. People would complete a scenario, and in it you will get options to answer particular questions. And depending on the question and how you answer it, you will be taken down one particular path, which may not necessarily be the correct path. It's like a game and there's scoring. But the learning is in a) if you pick the right answers you clearly understand the technical knowledge and what you should be doing but b) if you don't pick the right path, you don't get the right answers, you don't come to the right solution, but there's also learning in that too.'

All too often we forget that we learn more from what we get wrong than by getting it all right and how this is reinforced this back in the workplace.

Paolo Giuricich of smartEQ comments, 'It is important that we (as the learning professionals) facilitate the creation of the context of what comes after formal learning interventions to help mobilise team efforts and ensure [that] the learning sticks. For me, it's also about creating learning communities, at a micro team level, so learning for teams is self-supported and "just in time". Through digitisation, there is the further risk that the quality of relationships is diminished. However, I feel that the intrinsic, basic need of the human for inclusion, control and affection has to partly mitigate this risk, with attention being paid to even deeper relationship building within teams.'

### MOOCs

MOOCs (or massive open online courses) have expanded significantly in recent years as a source of learning. They provide access, through a number of strategic providers, to high-quality content in a number of areas. Nonetheless, significantly fewer people complete these programmes than start them. The three factors that determine whether an individual will complete a learning programme are:

- **motivation** – the strength of desire to undertake the programme
- **volition** – the amount of personal willpower needed to persevere to completion once they have started
- **relevance** – the fit of the programme to the individual's personal goals.

An individual may start a MOOC programme thinking that it is relevant or of interest but then finds it less relevant as they progress. The learner may not achieve the performance outcome they were looking for.

**Eventually, using virtual reality to create in-depth simulations will become possible in the MOOC environment.**

Employers are often reluctant to include MOOCs in organisational learning pathways as they fail to understand the relevance of the programmes offered, and hence employees are less inclined to use them.

There is also a question of post-course support to reinforce the learning. Increasingly, MOOC providers are using social learning techniques, such as creating forums of learners to support each other in using the application.

MOOCs themselves are starting to evolve with the evolution of the available technologies. Eventually, using virtual reality to create in-depth simulations will become possible in the MOOC environment. One major online course provider in China notes that simulations will play an important role in the MOOC environment. However, the technology is not quite ready.

#### **Microlearning**

One significant trend, particularly in the L&D community, is making learning interventions smaller and more accessible. This is referred to as either micro-learning or micro-decision-support. Topics tend to be short, no longer than 15 minutes, and accessible. They may form part of longer programmes or shorter stand-alone modules. It should be noted, however, that in the survey results (as shown in figure 3.4) there is not a strong preference amongst learners for this format.

While they cannot achieve significant performance change for an individual they do address the requirement for providing information in the moment by offering a range of interventions through a video or audio.

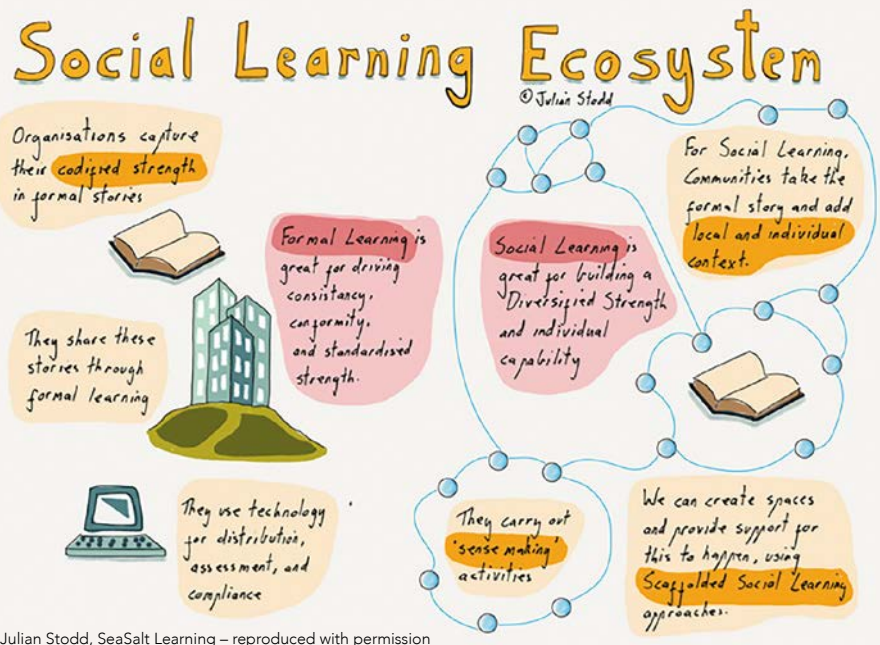
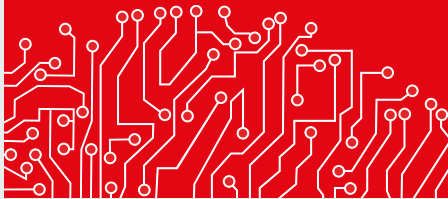
Christine Olivier of AVADO comments: 'Increasingly, there is a need for bitesize content, something digestible – a course demanding six to eight hours of study per week in a very linear way doesn't work for all learners. Keeping some structure and milestones are critical, especially for online learners, but content needs to be presented in smaller chunks to enable watching a video or completing a quiz in a more flexible way. It's also more suited to mobile learning'.

#### **Social learning**

One expanding feature linked to both online and in-person events is social learning, ie the use of collaborative feedback between individuals in relation to one learning event or a sequence of such events. We are familiar with sharing our views online, why not apply this in the learning context?

Julian Stodd, author and captain of Sea Salt Learning, a social learning consultancy, considers the importance of social learning from his perspective in the commentary below.

## Social learning and the future of organisations



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Organisations hold a codified strength: they are good at doing the things that they know how to do. More than good at it: often they are excellent, and put considerable effort into capturing that capability into replicable, scalable, quality-assured, systems and processes, to ensure that they continue to do as well as they are doing now. That's almost a definition of an organisation: it collectivises, and achieves effect at scale, through consistency and quality. But what if that is no longer enough?

My work concerns the Social Age, the new reality that we inhabit – our evolved ecosystem – where many of those things that we knew (with certainty) were true, turn out to be untrue. Technology is a visible manifestation of this change, but the true change is more, far more, than simply gadgets.

The Social Age has seen connection at scale, enabling us to form globally local tribes, bonded by trust, pride and purpose. And these are neither owned, nor controlled, by any formal organisation at all.

### But so what?

I find that complex, global, highly successful organisations wish to retain that description: they recognise their historic strength, they observe that something has changed, and they want to evolve, to meet the new need. And yet they often struggle to do so, because organisations are not simply collections, process, contract, and control. Organisations are themselves tribal structures, held constrained by the very forces that make those tribes cohesive.

We need to build something new: a socially dynamic organisation, a type of organisation that retains the very best of what has gone before, but learns the very best of what we need today, to survive, to thrive, in the context of the Social Age.

Learning is part of this: organisational learning concerns the stories that we tell to people, that we share out into the system. These we own and can rewrite as we need. But social learning concerns a different type of story: it's a story that is written, and owned, by members of the community itself. These stories live within the tribal structure we saw above: they are inside your organisation, but hidden from view. Hidden, because we have not earned the right to read them yet.

This is how an organisation becomes socially dynamic: it learns to hold open spaces for communities to inhabit, it learns to lead socially, not just formally, and it learns to listen to the stories, the tribal and tacit wisdom, of the communities that it hosts. Social learning is what we gain if we develop humble social leaders: leaders who find their strength in listening, not just talking.

The value of social learning is that it's grounded right in the lived experience of those people who know best. It's not always tidy, nor is it easy to find, and hear, these stories. But it's incredibly valuable if we wish to adapt our organisations to thrive in the Social Age. Formal systems are great at continuing to do what they have always done. And social ones are great at figuring out what they should do next. ■

Software is increasingly incorporating social feedback mechanisms in virtual classrooms, bringing them ever closer to in-person events.

### AR and VR and virtual classrooms

Augmented and virtual reality (AR and VR) technologies provide opportunities in the professional learning framework of the future. At present their use may be limited to more safety-critical applications, but the ability to bring simulated environments into the classroom, especially in areas where giving people direct access to the real situation is challenging logistically, can be of considerable benefit.

There are some examples of VR being used in the educational field, such as a course on safeguarding techniques for doctors. Some of the results of this demonstrate how our thought processes can differ from what was previously theorised and assumed in designing traditional courses, for example in our approach to learning risk management and compliance.<sup>4</sup>

The application of these technologies to providing virtual experiences has the potential to help close the induction gap where new hires, whose roles are moving up the value chain, are expected to be more proficient on day one than their peers may have been in previous years.

Virtual classrooms, such as Adobe's Connect platform, have allowed the delivery of experiential courses across a range of geographies simultaneously. These webinar platforms, when used with effective programme design, can produce good results.

This online learning environment will continue to evolve, with software being able to convey learner reactions to the facilitator without direct video linkage. Software is increasingly incorporating social feedback mechanisms in virtual classrooms, bringing them ever closer to in-person events.

### Chatbots and AI

The data-driven learning environment is becoming a reality, as is the ability to recommend learning interventions of whatever format to individuals on the basis of their prior achievements and future needs. When linked with advances in learning management, this starts to enable organisations to create more personalised learning pathways. As with any AI-based solution, however, care needs to be taken to avoid unintentional bias in recommendations.



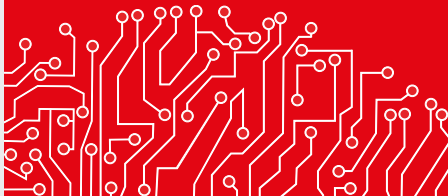
## CASE STUDY: AVADO Learning

### Christine Olivier of AVADO Learning explained how she sees the use of AI in supporting the learner journey.

'So, the [first of] four key things was...the user behaviour. You analyse the texts with predefined keywords and language that can be identified. And you eventually know that these types of learner always ask these types of question and these guys want quick or slow answers or whatever. Then the other side of that is the clustering, so grouping questions by issue types, via content description tags. Then the other one is just about effectiveness, so just identify how well queries have been answered. If you automate things, then also have an option for students to do a "best answer" option. So, five people respond and you can say that one [gave] the best answer and then that leads into even better accuracy going forward. And then that leads into your prioritisation also in terms of what are the most effective questions? What questions tend to need the biggest urgency in terms of responses?' ■

4 VR to train Doctors on Child Safeguarding, Medium, accessed 20 August 2018

## Virtual reality and augmented reality – the future of organisational learning?



**The definition of VR is based, naturally, on the definitions for both ‘virtual’ and ‘reality’. The definition of ‘virtual’ is ‘nearly as described’ and reality is ‘things as they actually exist’. So the term ‘virtual reality’ essentially means ‘near-reality’.**

While a vague term in itself, it usually refers to a specific type of reality emulation. VR is a concept that has been around for many years, especially for gaming and computerised simulations. Now, however, it is becoming an integral part of learning as educational institutions start to integrate VR elements into the ‘blended’ approaches as a learning technology enabling learning efficiencies. Business is also taking up VR as something to support continuing professional development or as a performance support mechanism; more notably, safety-critical organisations use VR to enable personnel to practise critical drills and procedures within simulated hazardous environments, such as wind turbines (operating at height) and the military (weapons familiarisation). Both examples serve to promote operating within a safe but immersive environment where any mistakes made do not endanger personnel.

VR is about immersion within a specific environment that can be accessed through mobile platforms or PCs as 3D-simulated environments or through the use of a headset. The merits of each method depend on its utility in, and the requirements of, the learning situation it is being used to support. With that in mind, VR becomes a highly flexible and adaptable tool and can support a range of other business functions by bringing a sense of real life to learning and professional development.

Augmented reality (AR) can be defined as the integration of digital information with the user’s environment in real time. Unlike VR, which creates a totally artificial

environment, AR uses the existing environment and overlays new information on top of it. AR can bring benign pictures to life with supported software applied to portable devices. AR in this instance can positively support both formal and informal learning strategies, especially within organisations and premises where space is at a premium and physical training aids are not available or it is not practical to have them present all the time. Through clever coding, a flat two-dimensional object can be made to appear quite spectacular and dynamic, supporting personnel at any time or point of access. This facilitates real-time learning for the inquisitive mind.

Professional services (medical, financial, customer service, for example) are beginning to embrace the merits of simulated environments to assist in continuing professional development, maintaining competence and performance through scenario- and problem-based learning concepts (challenging individuals). Where ‘on-demand’ learning is available at the click of a few buttons, meeting the needs of learners becomes a significant factor when expectations of ‘support now’ is a potential incentive in engaging in ‘fast track’ programmes. Ready accessibility of simulated environments not only supports performance but also enables and empowers individuals to learn safely at their own pace.

Both VR and AR have their place in supporting learning, on demand performance and the delivery of training; they can also provide many efficiencies so that savings can be realised, especially in the case of hardware. It’s easier and more cost efficient to try again when you make a mistake in the virtual world than it is to replace a wind turbine! ■

**Alistair Watkins, Consultant Learning and Development, Babcock International Group**



We must recognise the need to learn and develop continuously and L&D teams need to support this evolution.

### 3.4 THE FUTURE OF THE L&D COMMUNITY

We must recognise the need to learn and develop continuously and L&D teams need to support this evolution.

An L&D team needs to consider what they wish to record and how they wish to record it. They also need to consider how they recommend content, for example following the recommendations of other learners in a social environment.

With any of these options, learners are expressing a clear demand for a personalised journey that is relevant to them and their circumstances and personal needs. They do not want a generic offering. This creates challenges for those who design learning pathways.

#### The LMS and the content curator

Most L&D teams have relied on learning management systems (LMSs) to provide learners with catalogues of courses available to them and enable them to indicate a desire to attend or complete a particular activity. These systems have provided the means by which the L&D team could control the content. Integration of these systems into on-demand video portals and similar systems provides content to users but ignores the reality that it is the effectiveness of the learning experience and not the length of screen time that results in a desired performance outcome.

In the evolving learning environment, the learner is increasingly side-stepping the LMS to enrol in programmes 'off-piste'. If the role of L&D teams is to evolve successfully into curators of content, then the LMS needs to evolve as well.

Later generations of software, often termed 'learner experience platforms' (LXPs), offer capabilities for aggregating content from both internal and external sources and presenting it to learners in a more socially orientated environment. If organisations are to offer relevant and comprehensive learning journeys they need to consider the potential of such software when they next revisit their LMS.

The data-driven society has an impact on the learning choices that individuals make. L&D teams can use data derived from the prior experiences of others who have

followed similar programmes to provide advice to learners on opportunities that are relevant to them. While this can offer some value, as can tools that recommend learning experiences by drawing on reviews by previous learners, caution is necessary as there is a need to be relevant to the personal learning journey. The support of others in making these choices remains essential.

### 3.5 AN SME PERSPECTIVE

While it may appear that many of the issues raised in this report are best tackled by larger organisations with significant investment budgets, this is not necessarily the case and the greatest advantage could well lie with the small and medium-sized organisations.

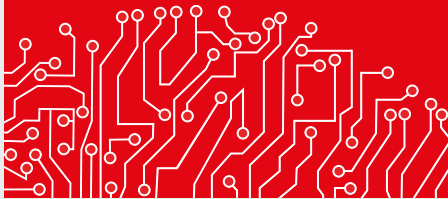
High-quality learning programmes are now ever more accessible to learners, irrespective of the employing organisation. On-demand services such as edX provide access to a wide range of programmes not hitherto accessible.

SMEs are now also able to develop and maintain an effective learning culture, one in which the results of skill development are often more tangible and visible for the individual than is the case in larger organisations.

SMEs do face challenges when dealing with older generations in the workplace. Often these individuals can find adapting to changing ways of working more challenging than younger people. They may require more investment, especially in informal learning and coaching, if they are to remain effective.

Pratik Karania from a sole practitioner in Kenya commented: 'Yes, it is a cost implication [but] when you sit with them and explain to them, "look this is what we are, this is where we are"; do not give them things like, "we cannot afford this or that" and on the other side you are building hundreds of thousands of dollars and they know all about it, no. Just give them the picture, "look, we are increasing", give them the full story and I think people understand. That is why they have stuck with us for that long, and I think the speaking out and explaining to them works for us.'

**L&D needs to become relevant to have a voice at the big table**



**L&D has a poor reputation as an inconvenient necessity and must radically evolve if it is to have any value in the modern workplace.**

Over \$130 billion (£100 billion) (Bersin 2017) a year is spent on L&D but with a negative Net Promoter Score it is evident that there is much to be done in the industry if L&D professionals are to become valued strategic partners able to deliver learning experiences that drive performance and business agendas – much like the finance function has moved from policeman to expert partner.

The future of work and the business of people and performance is evolving at an exponential rate, creating complex and challenging issues that can no longer be solved by the typical L&D responses all too often relied upon today. L&D professionals need to demonstrate how they are able to deliver against the 4 critical levers of business; growth, transformation, productivity & profitability.

In order to move forward, L&D needs to be aware of where it is and how it is viewed. With a reputation for being overwhelmed and under-equipped to grow at the pace and quality required to respond to the needs of business, it is evident that it is a function – or perhaps even an industry – in need of transformation. Key challenges exist in being able to improve this reputation. Paramount among them is the engagement of strategic partners in senior roles in organisations. Lack of awareness and understanding by leaders of their role and responsibilities in the ‘learning dividend’, their inability or reticence to champion modern learning cultures or to promote their significant long-term impact are serious challenges that should be within the gift of an informed L&D function to identify, address and resolve.

L&D is capable of so much more but has regularly allowed itself to be seen as an

order taker rather than a performance consultant. This, and the lack of professional investment has led to an erosion of the profession’s ability to tackle modern and future learning challenges. Like any profession, there needs to be a continual injection of accredited expert learning, innovation and infrastructure focus to be productive, to perform and to add value. Without a significant transformation L&D will struggle to be seen as an appealing career of choice, Centre of expertise and attract the best talent. There is a need to create appealing professional careers – and progression routes – that are viewed by other professionals as worthwhile and aspirational. Without this, the L&D profession is in danger of being seen as a support function populated by people passionate about training rather than a profession that attracts ambitious critical thinkers with the skills and abilities needed to lead businesses and drive a competitive edge e.g. bring, build & allow people to be at their best.

L&D’s reputation and opinions are not new revelations, but they are frustrating as they show no immediate signs of improving. In fact, when digging deeper into the view of both executives and leaners, L&D must now sit up and accept that only a transformative approach will be able to change the tide of the global L&D-Capability market net promoter score (NPS) which has been tracking significantly below even a ‘good’ level (between -8 and -14) for many years .

Transforming means revolutionising our approach to L&D. Strategic L&D leaders and all L&D experts need to focus on learner-centric models that drive high impact learning cultures that can engage and support the workforce to adapt and transform in line with the business needs. They also need to see leaders and learners as ‘consumers’ of learning. Consumers who are looking for L&D to always be on and for inspiring and relevant resources. ►

To survive, L&D needs to reinvest in its own capability and revisit its core purpose to bring a competitive edge to organisations by unleashing the potential of the people they support.



They demand an L&D brand experience that impacts performance, when they need it and how. This means convenient, easy to access, on-the-go, personalised, outcome focused learning experiences that deliver from all angles of the employee lifecycle. L&D must decide where they can add value and where they can't. L&D can't do everything, and they will continue to fail if they do. L&D need to get comfortable with saying no where they can't add value!

L&D need to think differently and smart when it comes to solving the learning challenges of the future, like the growth of professional careers. L&D would traditionally approach a professional accredited capability challenge by either stepping aside or by trying to do everything the finance function orders. A future focused L&D approach would be to build a robust partnership with leading professional bodies. By doing this, L&D not only tap into the future needs and challenges of the Finance profession but by using intelligent resources, data and networks it allows L&D to bring the outside in, apply relevant context but remove any internal bias or out of date thinking.

As change agents responsible for growth, we need to focus our expertise on pin pointing and driving organisational capability priorities. We need to work side-by-side with leaders and the business to analyse, govern and report on the success of the L&D strategy and prospectus by aligning with and using the right metrics and language of business, eg speed and quality to competence, productivity. We need to support and influence leaders to see the value of investing in strategic L&D and high impact learning cultures. We also need to support learners to learn how to learn, self-direct and apply their learning to impact performance. We need to support the organisation to build an effective knowledge economy by facilitating

effective and modern learning ecosystems that can be accelerated by incorporating the right digital resources e.g. communities of practice and self-curation.

Organisations urgently need fresh and expert L&D thinking. They need strategic and credible professionals that can analyse the priority and long-term capability needs, provide real performance expertise, influence digital ecosystems that support, formal, social and mobile learning and drive dynamic adult learning architectures and transfer strategies. To survive, L&D needs to reinvest in its own capability and revisit its core purpose to bring a competitive edge to organisations by unleashing the potential of the people they support. To deliver on this purpose and build trust, they need to be able to provide insights and analytics on human capital investment that clearly demonstrate how they add commercial value e.g. proof that their L&D strategy drives the four critical levers of business. Organisations urgently need fresh and expert L&D thinking. They need strategic and credible professionals who can analyse the priorities and long-term capability needs, provide real performance expertise, influence digital ecosystems that support formal, social and mobile learning and build dynamic adult learning architectures and transfer strategies. To survive, L&D professionals need to reinvest in their own capability and revisit L&D's core purpose of bringing a competitive edge to organisations by unleashing the potential of the people they support. To achieve this purpose and build trust, they need to be able to provide insights and analytics on human capital investment that clearly demonstrate how they add commercial value, ie proof that their L&D strategy drives the four critical levers of business. ■

**Jane Daly**  
L&D expert analyst, Director and founder of People who Know



## 4. Recommendations – embracing change

**The successful accountant of the future is one who recognises the need to develop their skills on continuously. They take responsibility for their own development but accept that while they need to keep technically proficient, they also need to ensure that they have the softer skills needed to provide the required service.**

This leads to the factors, underpinned by the responses in ACCA's roundtables, that learning in the workplace is becoming a personalised journey: one where learning interventions need to address the specific performance gaps or opportunities of the individual, and to encompass both personal and technical skills in the right balance.

The individual will achieve the required level of performance through a blend of learning interventions, supported by on-the-job reflection and mentoring. The range of interventions continues to expand and as individuals we need to consider which are right for us, given the performance level that we want to achieve. The range of options available to us as learners continues to increase.

**Ensure that you continuously invest in your skill development to ensure that your skills remain relevant for the role that you are performing.**

#### **4.1 ADVICE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

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##### **Embrace the challenge of fast-evolving careers**

- Accept that traditional career paths are being disrupted and that there is a need to plan differently for the career choices of tomorrow.
- Ensure that you continuously invest in your skill development to ensure that your skills remain relevant for the role that you are performing.
- Appreciate when you need to learn right now how to apply a fact or skill but also when you need to invest in longer-term programmes to develop your skills.
- Consider how you will develop the deep skills needed while being sufficiently flexible.

##### **Embrace the range of opportunities for learning**

- Remember that it is your journey and your skill set that will differentiate you from others and enable you to build your own 'brand'.
- Identify how you prefer to learn from the range of options available to you.
- Seek opportunities to reinforce what you learn.
- Consider your return on investment – free resources will not be the best or enable you to achieve the performance change that you seek.

##### **Ensure that you take responsibility for your own developmental journey**

- Nobody else will do this, but you need the help of employers and the broader learning community to understand your needs and how these can be addressed.
- Recognise the skills that you already have.
- Don't constrain your own potential: be adaptive.
- Use your personal network to seek out opportunities to advance.

##### **Use the range of 'proofs' of skill available**

- Seek badges and micro-qualifications to develop your skills and demonstrate capability.
- Be prepared to share your achievements on social platforms.

##### **Seek guidance and support from others**

- Take advantage of social learning.
- Use the technologies available to broaden your learning.
- Embrace global communities that you can be a part of.
- Share ideas and experiences.
- Seek out career mentors.

**Recognise and reward learning as an investment essential for growth, not as a cost of compliance.**

#### 4.2 ADVICE FOR THE EMPLOYER

**Align your organisation’s learning strategy to your strategic goals.**

- Treat L&D as a strategic tool not a compliance tool.
- Encourage diversity in learning approaches.
- Focus on equipping individuals to understand the ‘why’ rather than learning the ‘what’.
- Be sensitive in allowing time for personal development when job roles are increasingly squeezed and the coaching hierarchies are being disrupted as middle management roles are eliminated.

**Create and maintain an effective culture that supports continuous learning in the workplace.**

- Lead the learning culture in the organisation from the top.
- Recognise and reward learning as an investment essential for growth, not as a cost of compliance.
- Recognise the variety of learner preferences.
- Learning does not always have to be relevant to the job role – an effective learning culture often explores other areas where skills can be developed.
- Be open about the link between personal development and reward.

**Recognise the impact of the generational changes in the workforce and adopt a more flexible approach to learning; allow learners to identify content from both within and outside the organisation.**

- Consider the implications of outplacement programmes for those leaving the organisation as much as induction programmes for those entering.
- Be more flexible in allowing different sources of learning to form part of the organisation’s overall learning pathway. Not all learning should be developed by the L&D team.

**Recognise the impact of these changes on the time spent in mentoring and coaching; at times of change this is especially important.**

- Consider how effective career mentoring can be introduced, in particular to reflect the varied nature of career paths outside the organisation.
- Invest in ensuring that your organisation maximises the value obtained from on-the-job experiences by allowing time for, and promoting, self-reflection.
- Strengthen your alumni programmes, recognising that talent lost can often be regained later in careers.
- Evaluate the ACCA mentoring programme (in those countries where this is currently offered) and how it can support your organisation.

**Recognise that the way in which you, as an organisational leader, learnt in school and in the early parts of your career may not reflect the ways in which the current entrants prefer to learn.**

- Take time to understand the learning preferences of the different generations in the workplace.
- Recognise the different career structures of the emerging generations and be prepared to adapt programmes and learning interventions to suit them.
- Become the flexible leader in style and approach to learning.

**Measure effectiveness and return in longer-term growth – not short-term response.**

- Appreciate that long-term growth is essential for the success of the profession.
- Understand that this growth is dynamic and the forms it takes will continue to change and evolve.
- Recognise that staff development is a longer-term project rather than just a process for making a short-term gain.

**Be prepared to move your focus to developing talent strategically to add value to clients.**

#### 4.3 ADVICE FOR THE L&D COMMUNITY

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**Understand the role that learning plays in developing talent and achieving strategic value.**

- Become strategic partners in the rapidly changing workplace rather than order takers.
- Be prepared to move your focus to developing talent strategically to add value to clients.

**Anticipate the move from being providers to being curators of learning content.**

- Assess what you can provide to your learners in more flexible forms.
- Develop strategies to make use of the breadth of learning sources available.
- Provide guidance and support to learners on how to achieve most from the range of developmental programmes available.

**Revisit your systems strategy to reflect the shift in modes of learning consumption.**

- Develop a learning strategy that embraces technology.
- Consider how you can maximise the return on any existing learning management system.
- Investigate how you can develop and implement technology strategies that support social learning and maximally enhance the learner experience.
- Understand the power of data in the learning environment to support personal journeys.

**Improve learning design and focus on the personal journey.**

- Recognise that traditional learning designs that fit generic audiences no longer address the needs of learners.
- Consider how your learning programmes can support more individual learning and personalised journeys.
- Recognise how to support, rather than control, the 70% and the 20% as defined by Lombardo, M.M. and Eichinger, R. W (1996) of the learner journey.

**Consider how you support individuals' development into their next role rather than just their current role.**

- Consider the implications of the 'borrowing' resourcing model for your learning programmes.
- Recognise that the quality of the learning experience offered to the individual is essential in attracting the best talent when seeking to 'borrow' resources.



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