

# [transition to transformation]

## workplace learning in the current economy

### The People Investment

The economic shifts that began in 2008 and continue today have created a unique environment for business. Managing moving markets prone to wide swings, seeking stabilization without sacrificing agility, and perfecting the potential already present within organizations has seldom been more challenging. The simultaneous surge in retirement of Baby Boomers, looming mergers and cutbacks and the unchoreographed vocational restlessness of workers seeking to maximize their earning and influence potential in a job market changing by the day are just some of the weather patterns present for leaders to forecast and attempt to leverage during the emerging years of a new economy.

Within this context, the learning function has been a topic of central focus. How will the expertise of the Baby Boomer generation be replaced as they retire when internal turnover and reorganization has failed to hold experience securely in place? What structures must exist in order to convert adaptability to organizational change into positive performance? How can essential talent be recruited and retained for an enduring profitability and competitive advantage?

Leaders in businesses large and small are contemplating these questions and others as they investigate and integrate organizational learning demands for their companies. The answers they come to will contribute not only to how well they weather the current change, but also enable them to transform transitions into organizational growth and financial success.

This study seeks to explore and share some of the observations of learning leaders, executives and organizational experts on how the people investment can be maximized in such a time as this.



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## A Workforce on the Move

In a September 2009 survey\*, full-time and part-time salaried and hourly employees and managers were asked if they were currently on the job hunt.

- **49% stated they were actively seeking or planning to seek new employment**
- **45% stated they expected to stay with their current employer**

- **6% indicated they didn't yet know their plans related to employment change**

In the same study, 22% of those ages 30-44 cited "lack of career progress" as the leading cause for their dissatisfaction. Research shows that nearly 40% of them will act upon their turnover intentions. Providing career development has become critical to retaining talent and organizational intelligence.

\*Managing Talent in a Turbulent Economy: Keeping Your Team in Tact, Deloitte; Sep 2009.

***"During such times...it is the choice and depth of focus – and not the breadth and speed of expansion – that lead to sustained, profitable growth."***

*Chris Zook, James Allen, Profit from the Core: A Return to Growth in Turbulent Times; Harvard Business Press, Feb 2009.*

### Exodus of a Generation

In a recent report to the President, The U.S. Small Business Administration acknowledged the following dynamic conditions expected to impact the U.S. workforce with compelling significance:

- The Baby Boom generation currently comprises 78.2 million Americans.
- The first wave of this group has already begun to retire; this process will accelerate over the next decade.
- Firms will see a mass exodus of institutional knowledge that will be difficult to replace.
- Many organizations are already enticing retirees to delay their departure in order to capture their knowledge and to prepare others to step into these roles.
- This shift alone could lead to labor shortages, particularly in technological and health occupations.

The Small Business Economy: A Report to the President  
Small Business Administration, 2009.

### Speaking of Talent Retention

While many understand that there are currently four generations present in today's workforce, what may surprise you is how varied their key motivation is when it comes to work and what they want to hear most from their organization.

**Traditionalists (b. 1922-1945)**

**"Your experience is respected."**

**Baby Boomers (b. 1946-1964)**

**"You are valued. You are needed."**

**Generation X (b. 1965-1980)**

**"Do it your way. Forget the rules."**

**Millennials (b. 1981-2000)**

**"You will work with other bright, creative people."**

Adapted from *Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees* by Greg Hammill, FDU Magazine On-line; Winte/Spring 2005.

Do you speak their language? Understanding the key values language of each learner may prove to be the difference between retaining key talent and watching them walk out the door.

# The Evolution of Investment

“...U.S. organizations spent **\$134.07 billion** on employee learning and development.”

Source: State of the Industry Report, ASTD; DEC 2009



## What are your strategic priorities?

It is no secret that in recent times, learning and development has been the subject of particular scrutiny for organizations of all sizes as companies cope with a changing workforce, attrition, downsizing, as well as internal reorganizations and comprehensive mergers.

While challenging for learning leaders, this scrutiny has resulted in a new level of clarity of learning priorities and their direct application to business strategy.

In a recent Drake Resource Group survey, more than 200 learning leaders were asked which topics would take priority in their organizations over the next 12 months:

- **46%** named **Business Strategy, New Manager Skills and Communication Skills** as sharing the top priority
- **39%** cited **Organizational Development** as second in priority
- **23%** placed **Customer Service and Regulatory Compliance** as third.

## What will your organization invest in 2011?

Leaders understand that ongoing financial and operational commitment is required to leverage human capital to the fullest, especially in difficult times.

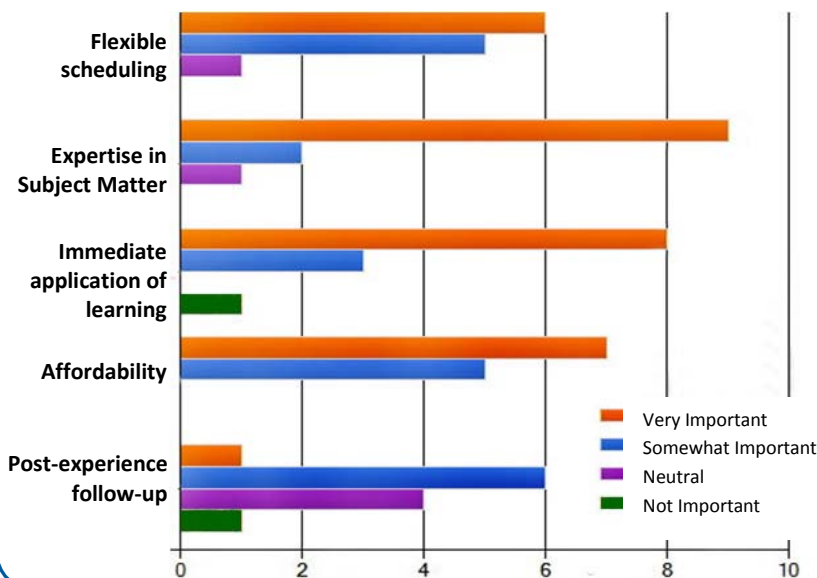
In an August 2010 survey conducted by Drake Resource Group, learning leaders were asked to anticipate how their investment in learning may change over the next 12 months.

**Over 69% of learning leaders surveyed anticipated an increase or no change to current learning investment, despite economic challenges.**

As economic uncertainty persists, there is an opportunity for the learning function to play an even more important role in financial recover with talent recruiting, retention and effective human capital development.

## What matters most when selecting an external learning opportunity?

In the same survey, nearly **55%** of learning leaders anticipated an **increase** in the use of vendor-provided learning next year. How will they shop for the best fit?



# Learning Transformation



Successful learning was once formulaic and proven, now it is nimble, ever-changing and requires flexible, shorter range plans – and flexible, independent individuals.

Finding a way to integrate emerging technology with the valued methods of the past may require you to jump in, grab the cat by the tail, hang on, and learn.

Don't kid yourself. The move away from a classic *deductive* (externally driven) learning model to a more *inductive* (internally driven) model is a significant shift.

Consider the following window into what learning in the workplace used to look like and what it looks like when it is effective today.

*“If you hold a cat by the tail, you learn things you cannot learn any other way.”*

*Mark Twain*

## How it was...

## How it is...

## Learning Then & Now

### Read & Remember

Organizations established the priority of learning, outlined the curriculum, and created a context of when and where the learning could occur.

### Discover & Discern

Culturally, self-initiated learning has become a daily norm for most people in our now on-line, increasingly global society. Organizations need to help guide their employees to reliable sources of information amidst the watershed of data, and continue to provide time and space for learning.

### Mastery

Becoming an expert (Subject Matter Expert) on prescribed information was seen as the ultimate goal for workplace learning.

### Connection

The rapid responses of organizations to fluctuating markets makes becoming an “expert” not only unlikely but also potentially a waste of time. Being well-connected to sources and knowing where to find knowledge versus mastering content is a far more sustainable value in times of deep change.

### Learning Goals

Learning was a function of organizational need. Learning content and goals for individuals were largely derived from the strategic plan of the organization and resulting business needs.

### Learning Roles

Instead of charting learning from mission, learning leaders are reordering to individual potential, and then directing that person to the role in the organization where their potential can yield the most positive impact for the organization. Learning is less bound to context and more flexible/mobile for responsive leadership as needed.

### Longevity

Learning was able to take place over time as tenure remained desirable and employees sought to form a career path within one organization.

### Experience

Today's employees seek and value varied experience; staying with one organization is no longer expected or even desired. Gathering experience is their primary goal, not the stability of tenure. Providing diverse opportunities in-house is critical to talent retention.

## A New Curriculum

The role for organizational learning is changing. Learning leaders who are in tune with the culture are gradually discovering that their jobs have shifted away from being a major learning provider into more of *gatekeeper* of the quality and accuracy of outside content,

*helping to manage the learning that is already taking place – on-line, at home, at work and on social networking sites.* Training will continue to be in high demand. The Net Generation brings with it a whole new definition of “basic skills.”

### What will successful employees need to learn over the next five years?

#### Research & Organization Skills

Individuals need assistance in translating their information skills from home into the office. Encourage quality sources from trusted experts, but stop short of prescribing content. Also, helping employees to identify and remain clear about their learning focus is crucial to retaining the time management efficiencies offered by this broader delivery.

#### Self-Leadership & Goal Setting

Teaching employees the value and process of identifying career goals and then matching those goals to emerging internal opportunities will be an effective way to retain key talent. A clear career path for managers may be difficult to trace in a shifting organization, but understanding what employees have to offer enables you to be on the watch for an appropriate next step, before they look elsewhere.

#### Mentoring

The age of information mastery may be coming to an end, but effective networkers are the “SME’s” of today. A strong mentoring bond can create relationship collateral between an employee and an organization, helping to retain and re-train expertise. In the age of “me-learning”, try just in time mentoring and notice a difference in learner satisfaction.

#### Knowledge Application

Companies used to be information providers, but the reality today is that learners are gathering information on their own. Companies must shift to helping employees apply the non-contextualized knowledge they’ve already acquired in other sources to effective, real world settings.

#### Meta Skills of Leadership

In our virtual society, many entering lack what used to be basic relational skills: effective face-to-face interaction and conversation, eye contact, and non-verbal behavior. Covering these vital practices before launching into leadership development may make your program more successful.



*Perspective:*

#### One Learning Provider’s Response

With more than sixteen years of experience in providing learning solutions for a diverse client list of Fortune 100 companies, mid-sized organizations, non-profits and associations, Drake Resource Group has been living the transformation into the new realities of workplace learning.

Despite award-winning eLearning courses and sought-after instructors, the company’s president and founder, Sue Drake, noted a marked shift early on in the 2000’s - well before the economy dipped.

“What we were experiencing had a lot more to do with the shift in our culture than the economy. The drop in the markets merely escalated the rate of change; it didn’t set the direction,” Sue Drake says.

She continues, “We have finally become what we in the learning industry have been championing for years – *whole-life learners*. Organizations now have the opportunity to capitalize on this external momentum to channel it into a positive force for growth.”

*(Continued on page 6)*



*Perspective:*

## One Learning Provider's Response

*Continued...*

But discovering *how* to capitalize on this momentum has required fresh perspective. "We still create custom curriculum and eLearning solutions, but the fastest growing segment of our business is our learning portal, *Ascendis Learning Connection*, where we provide access to proven content authored by in-the-field experts, available as needed, 24/7. Internally, we've reorganized and reprioritized around this new market demand."

On-line learning environments like *Ascendis Learning Connection* are finding fast success inside the self-directed learning culture. Learners can engage on their own schedule to improve skills, connect with experienced leaders and network with other learners. Content is organized by roles, like "New Manager" or "Executive", in addition to topic areas, and is refreshed regularly.

"It has been a demanding and exciting shift, but I'm confident this change is here to stay," Drake states. Skyrocketing social learning statics agree.

*For more information, visit [www.AscendisLearning.com](http://www.AscendisLearning.com).*

# Know Where You're Going

Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else." Even though this is a time of great change and experimentation within the discipline of workplace learning, don't let the end-goal get lost: developing people.

As we continue to make our way out of the downturn, we will thrive in direct proportion to how much we learn from this experience. As learning leaders, we know how to do that. Our opportunity to help transform our workplaces into true learning organizations has arrived.

***"The best strategy for building a competitive organization is to help individuals become more of who they are."***

*Marcus Buckingham*

## Discover....Connect....Experience

How can *your* organization make the most of the new learning age when it comes to workplace learning? Here are a few questions to reflect on during your own self-directed learning on the topic:

What do we need to **DISCOVER?**

- Do we have a good understanding of our current internal learning needs?
- Have we mapped out our trouble spots and found creative solutions?
- What would our employees say about the relevance of what we offer?

Are we **CONNECTED?**

- Are we plugged into the right sources for learning, in terms of cost and need?
- Is what we need available when we need it or are access issues costing us?
- What would our employees say about the availability of learning here?

Whose **EXPERIENCE** can we learn from?

- What model organizations/mentor leaders can we learn from?
- Who in our organization already "gets" this kind of learning?
- How can we utilize those individuals to their fullest potential?

Cost savings, improved effectiveness, and higher productivity await those who lead their organizations through this transition and into transformation. ▲