ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 190 Wednesday 16 february 2022

School and Work: eLearning trends and declinations

Chris Eigeland and Anant Agarwal's predictions on the 2022 evolution and trends of online training in business and academia

With the pandemic seemingly settling down to a new normal and businesses resuming their ordinary operations, there are questions about the next developments for education. Two prominent voices in the industry give their thoughts on the trends that will take hold beginning in 2022. Chris Eigeland, CRO and co-founder of Go1, the world's largest professional course library, and Anant Agarwal, former CEO of EdX, consider the evolution of work-based and academic training, respectively.

Between companies, which are as much part of the supply as part of the demand, and users - whether students or workers - there are symmetrical needs: to work with the best counterpart, to optimize their investment in education, to be able to adapt to structural or sudden changes in the market. This interaction contributes to shaping the form and content of eLearning training, which is becoming increasingly widespread.

Trends in the world of work

Smart working, a false English term with nuances that vary from remote work to complete autonomy of time and place of performance of a task, is now an established fact. Sure, Covid quarantines have made agile working a necessity for business continuity in companies and beyond, but the phenomenon was in place before the pandemic. As early as 2017, Law 81/2017 spoke of "*forms of organization by phases, cycles and objectives and without precise constraints of time or place of work, with the possible use of technological tools to carry out the work activity.*" Flexibility equals productivity and convenience.

According to the Ipsos survey conducted for Confesercenti, two companies out of three plan to maintain this modality in the future while the workers interviewed express their general appreciation. What suffers, if anything, is the management of human resources with greater pressure to manage staff on site and remotely, to retain the best talent already in the company, to select candidates with the appropriate professional and interpersonal skills and periodically assess their profile.

These tasks reveal the delicacy of HR managers' role, as revealed by Randstand's **HR trends and salary survey** of 2021: nearly 30% of respondents cited managing skills shortages as a challenge, just over one in four cited training proposals for managing hybrid work and gamification programs as initiatives taken to incentivize employees.

In this scenario, eLearning is one of the most useful tools: easily usable content, modularity of offerings and user evaluation are among the features most appreciated for some time. But in order to confirm itself as a privileged means of managing the wealth of skills, it must continue its evolution. Companies are evolving, and so is the training offer. This is supported by important voices in the sector.

Chris Eigeland, CRO and co-founder of Go1, the world's largest professional course library, points to **possible industry developments in 2022**:

1. Reduced content format
2. Learning in the flow
3. Growth opportunities
4. Not just skills
5. Caring for emotional intelligence
6. Attention to different learning styles
7. SMEs to the rescue

It's not just about reducing attention spans. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have made users more demanding with content: time is not always an indicator of quality. Anything that can be expressed clearly and concisely has a greater reach. Training is

no exception, indeed. The more practical its content, the more it is designed to **optimize its duration**. Just in time applied to courses allows businesses and employees more flexibility on how it is used: a course in separate half-hour modules can be taken more comfortably than one that takes an uninterrupted morning. This could make it easier for employees to upskill-the deepening of their skills-by exploring new areas.

More concise modules can be addressed during the normal course of work. Short audio-visual material allows for **learning in the flow**: it can be exchanged between colleagues on platforms such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, complete with comments and advice, or it can be accessed as a review of an ongoing process.

Growth opportunities are one of the tools with which to ensure staff retention. As smart working becomes more prevalent, aspects such as the work environment, sense of belonging, and relationship with colleagues and superiors tend to shrink: workers are more likely to change if the relationship between economic conditions and growth prospects on the one hand, and alternative opportunities on the other, is not adequate. Right up to the borderline case of the **Great Resignation**, an unexpected phenomenon that saw mid-career employees resign en masse from U.S. companies in 2021 in response to the changing labor market.

So in 2022, companies will be led to consider the growth of their staff as a whole: not just in skills and tasks, but also in their mental and physical well-being. According to Eigeland, topics such as burnout prevention, interpersonal relationship management and stress management will be adopted by companies to protect the mental well-being of staff. Along the same lines, training on aspects of **emotional intelligence** will enter the roster of courses required by businesses. As the leadership style changes from authoritarian to empathetic - the team player that replaced the old office manager - it becomes important to foster and train these interpersonal qualities in managers.

To be truly effective, a course must be able to benefit all of its users, each with their own learning style. The concept refers not only to personal preferences but extends to **neurodiversity**: courses designed to address conditions such as autism, attention deficits and specific learning disabilities in general, which can be the cause of poor job and career performance. The point is inclusion of diversity as an organizational priority. Neurodiversity should be seen as a different way of relating to the world, rather than a limitation of functioning, given that it can benefit everyone. Thinking about these categories when designing a course would allow us to test the quality of the content and the validity for the entire audience.

The development of the right skill set, while important for a large firm, is vital for SMEs. Small size, limited resources, and minimal staff make their selection and acquisition vital. For SMBs, a misjudgment, late execution of the program, or superficial training can be unforgivable mistakes. On the other hand, for those that boast a more responsive organization, training budgets can be more easily sustained given their size.

The evolution of Go1, the platform founded by Chris Eigeland, reflects this positive moment for the eLearning industry. The latest funding round, $200 million as of July 2021, has anointed the Australian startup with unicorn status, one of six domestic companies to reach the $1 billion valuation. The platform, which collects and curates content from more than two hundred creators, operates like a library: none of the content is produced in-house. The business model focuses on ease of access for businesses and users, who can interface with a single entity that collects and organizes the content they require.

The trend in education: learner-centricity

Predictions of growth and considerations of future trends are not limited to job training. The other side of eLearning, as seen during the quarantines, is aimed at school education. Admittedly, the tool has not always been put to good use, perhaps due to its abrupt deployment; and perhaps the age of the students is the big discriminator between an effective form of learning and the risk of an alienating experience with respect to classroom sociability. But now, with the emergency subsiding, educators and institutions are focusing on the needs of students with specific programs.
Anant Agarwal, former CEO of EdX, speaking at the " **eLearnning for Human Capability Development**" conference in Riyadh, between January 24-27, summarizes the four trends that this learner-centricity can help turn into development opportunities:

1. The shift toward continuous online learning
2. The convergence toward shorter modules
3. The transition to blended learning
4. The reassessment of human skills in the working world.

Not only businesses, but also users - whether students or workers - are adopting a **lifelong learning** perspective: in 2020, the EdX survey confirmed that 45% of adults aged 18-64 would consider enrolling in an online course that would help them improve their career prospects.

When it comes to content, too, the preference for shorter modules and **decomposable programs** involves employers and employees: for nearly a quarter of the latter, their educational choice was geared toward getting jobs that were "pandemic-proof," meaning safer during downturns such as data science, digital marketing, and professional writing. Courses for which the completion time was months, useful for being able to reorient careers, and not taking years like university training programs.

The university is also set for a transformation: the return to the classroom is only likely to be partial. **Blended learning** will be able to adopt different forms that combine physical presence with online fruition. The trend could go so far as to move half of the university's educational offerings to the Internet.
Finally, Agarwal agrees with Eigeland's point: **soft skills** are expected to make a comeback in the company: the interpersonal skills that make teams and the entire organization work better. The training offer will adapt accordingly, as it has already done in the portfolio of the most popular courses on EdX: from those on leadership to effective communication and emotional intelligence.

So, between companies and students or workers, there are symmetrical needs: to work with the best counterpart, to optimize one's investment in education, to know how to adapt to structural or sudden changes in the market. This interaction helps shape the form and content of eLearning training, which is becoming increasingly widespread. The year 2022 will tell how and with what outcomes this will happen.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator