IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE
FUTURE

Survival Strategies For Training Professionals

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FOREWORD

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT IN TRANSITION

Training and development experts are challenged to adapt to the digital age. Keeping up with the advancements in digital learning technology and AI-driven competency development is not an easy task. Digital transformation in practice requires a shift in mindset, new competencies, and innovative programs. To meet this challenge, USOU has developed a unique framework that enables companies and training professionals to transform traditional learning into competency- and performance-based systems.

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I HAD A DREAM

THE CRISIS CONVERSATION

The meeting with old friends and colleagues went on until late at night. We had a lot to discuss, especially trying to examine ideas and concepts for their usefulness to reposition ourselves in the upcoming year. One of my friends was very concerned about his training institute, which had suffered massive losses due to the COVID crisis. The other, a self-employed coach, lost two of his most important clients and saw no way to gain new ones. I had been thinking for some months about the changes that were coming to the training industry in the foreseeable future and was able to contribute some interesting thoughts to the lively discussion. The situation was initially tense but loosened up with increasing alcohol consumption.

MY VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

After my colleagues went back to their hotel, I quickly fell into a deep sleep and had a

shocking dream. I woke up in the year 2030 to a gentle and friendly voice introducing itself as Alice, my personal virtual assistant. Alice asked me what I wanted for breakfast, and when I mentioned fried eggs with bacon, she referred me to my cholesterol level and recommended a healthier alternative. She seemed to know all of my health data and motivated me to do a short fitness routine. The fitness instructor appeared on a huge screen that filled almost an entire wall in my living room. Then Alice showed me a selection of the most important news and my schedule for the day. When I wanted to go to my garage, she made it clear that everything could be done from here.

My office was the next shock. It was a relatively small windowless room with black walls. In the middle stood a glass desk with a keyboard and an Apple augmented reality glasses on top. Here, I could hold all my meetings with clients and colleagues and do my work. Augmented reality has no geographical limitations, and meetings can take place virtually worldwide. Presentations are virtually limitless, explained Alice, and asked if I wanted to attend the development

team's meeting. I unsuccessfully searched for my iPhone until Alice, apparently amused, suggested I try using voice recognition.

FIRST VIRTUAL MEETING

The computer connected me with my general manager, Peter Nolen. It was as if he were standing life-sized in front of me, but the room looked completely different. This was not the conference room where we normally met to discuss projects for our online university. Peter stood next to a large low table with several comfortable chairs arranged around it. Otherwise, the room was empty, with black walls and no windows like my office.

"The team is meeting in 10 minutes," said Peter. Alice explained to me that all the meeting rooms were equipped with Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technology and that each team member was represented by a three-dimensional, photorealistic avatar. This allows the international development team to work on projects without any time or regional barriers. It was impressive, but what amazed me even more was my own avatar, which Alice had

already created from a body scan during my fitness routine. Peter then brought me up to speed, explaining that the offices, conference rooms, computer center with servers, and seminar rooms were all completely replaced by virtual counterparts, as well as a virtual research and development center. In other words, the headquarters of the United States Online University had been dissolved and now existed only in cyberspace. It was a thought that took me some time to process, but as the meeting began and I saw some colleagues and new team members introduced, I quickly recognized the high value of this time and cost-saving technology and way of working. Our avatars exchanged ideas, made suggestions, and presented parts of the project in the form of interactive holograms that appeared on the projection table.

THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

After the meeting ended, I asked Peter if he could show me the virtual university. The tour began in front of an impressive building. In the foyer, there was a reception area, several presentation monitors showing learning

programs and simulations, and several conference and seminar rooms. A staircase led up to more meeting rooms and open communication spaces. All the rooms were equipped with AR and VR features.

Why would a virtual university need conference and seminar rooms? I thought that participants would be processing the learning content at home or at work.

Peter explained: We also thought that way at first, when most teaching and learning activities were moved to virtual platforms like Zoom or Skype during and after the COVID crisis. Training departments, freelance trainers, coaches, and consultants quickly adapted to survive the situation. But online teaching soon turned out to be a step back, as personal contact, spontaneous exchange of ideas, and especially important feedback were lacking or often completely absent. With virtual meetings and seminars, where participants can interact through their avatars just like in real life, we have solved the feedback problem and also closed the social gap.

TRAINING IN CRISIS

THE FATE OF TRAINERS

**"Where have our trainers gone?"
I asked Peter.**

"We have completely eliminated trainers, as seminars usually consisted of lectures with some group exercises. This form of collective time wasting has no place in modern training. Trainers who primarily try to "train" participants through showmanship, information transfer, and the use of PowerPoint presentations are unnecessary in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We have therefore replaced trainers with virtual coaches.

The development of avatars has made huge strides in recent years. Nowadays, they process visual signals, register touch, understand languages, and react intelligently in conversations. They practically fulfill all the functions that psychologists summarize under

term "ambient intelligence". Our learning coaches come into play whenever "talking heads" are required and personal contact is in demand. Learners can choose from a variety of avatars. Our learning coaches do not suffer from performance fluctuations, do not get sick, and are always patient and friendly. They are learning companions, problem-solving assistants, motivators, life coaches, and crisis managers. In other words, the ideal partner for the learner.

What are the trainers doing now that they have been replaced by virtual learning coaches?

Apple, Google/Alphabet, Microsoft, IBM, and other software producers have purchased the best trainers and their know-how worldwide, digitized them, and developed industry-specific learning coaches with their Artificial Intelligence platforms. Today, programs are offered as cloud services at very affordable prices. What used to cost a company for a trainer for a day now provides them with a virtual learning coach for a month and for 100 employees.

Thanks to the augmented reality glasses of companies like Apple, training has been integrated into the routine workflow. Learning systems powered by artificial intelligence that offer problem-solving solutions, save time, actively involve employees in the learning process, can be highly individualized, and not only measure but also guarantee learning outcomes, have revolutionized training.

So, what has happened to our trainers, coaches, and consultants?

They have specialized in company-specific needs analysis and the development of tailored simulations. The tech giants were not interested in these niche markets because they involved too much individual work.

Detailed needs analyses are required to synchronize learning objectives with corporate goals. Companies have quickly recognized the benefits, and therefore, only training and development measures based on careful analysis are implemented.

Company-specific simulations are used to secure the transfer of knowledge. Simulations

have the advantage of being as close to real-life situations as possible, and participants can go through numerous situations that help them reinforce new behaviors without experiencing the negative consequences of practice. Practice simulations are an essential part of training and development measures.

Virtual stabilization systems have been developed to help employees apply new behaviors successfully in the workplace at any time. These systems come in various forms, from high touch to high tech.

The development of complex computer programs has enabled the delivery of the desired support whenever it is needed. Virtual coach systems (VCS) have emerged as favorites. These electronic coaches provide "how-to" video segments, intelligent error diagnoses, and innovative problem-solving directly at the workplace with the help of augmented reality glasses.

Virtual coach systems have also replaced "follow-up." From today's perspective, follow-up and maintenance to maintain behavior are no longer necessary. In practice, this means

that follow-up meetings between employees and managers are no longer necessary. Personal development plans are integrated into the systems and are constantly updated based on the learner's progress. This also applies to on-the-job training, which already takes place in the simulations. So-called auditory seminars are also no longer necessary because learners are competent and capable after training. The gap between training and practice is closed.

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

How has the change in further education taken place?

Peter explained: Triggered by the COVID crisis, economic uncertainty initially spread. Many companies "shrunk" or completely closed their training departments. Training budgets were partially drastically reduced. This led to insecurity and fear of job loss among employed trainers. Existential anxiety increased significantly among freelance trainers and coaches.

The famous author and futurist Ray Kurzweil believes that the 21st century will not represent one hundred years, but the equivalent of approximately 20,000 years. "Both technology and human development are growing exponentially," he explains. "In five years, we will probably not have jobs or learning activities as we know them today."

But it was not only the reduced budgets that made trainers worry, but also the rapid development in the technological field. Online teaching and learning quickly gained ground and took over large areas of further education. Trainers were rightly concerned. All trends indicated that the further education industry was in upheaval. What they experienced was the beginning of a new era in professional further education.

Trainers who recognized the signs of the times and acquired new competencies had temporarily succeeded. However, the new job requirements for further education providers that progressive companies already created clearly showed that this was only phase one of a massive change. Companies were following developments in the field of artificial

intelligence (AI) with great interest and hoped that the entire process from competency analysis to the development of effective interventions and the implementation of measures to results measurement would soon be automated and standardized.

It was known that the profession of a trainer was not regulated by the state. There was no universally valid job profile. The training of trainers was not clearly defined, and for this reason, numerous providers with sometimes dubious programs were active in this market segment, which only helped one person: the organizer.

The profession of a trainer had no access requirements, and therefore, pretty much everything came together here - from top-notch training professionals to charlatans. Many felt called, but only a few actually fulfilled this demanding profession. Professional associations, quality guardians, universities, and all kinds of further education institutes tried to create more transparency and offer a qualified trainer education through sometimes complex courses, job-qualifying

certificates, quality seals, and industry-specific quality actions, but with little success.

We wondered back then what would happen if the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) reached human-level intelligence? And when will that be reality? Powerful AI algorithms enabled the development of learning programs and coaching systems in the cloud. They became reality within three years and deprived trainers of their raison d'être.

THE NEW REQUIREMENTS

The breakthrough of Google's DeepMind, the convergence of huge amounts of cloud computing, a large selection of virtual learning programs, excellent learning coaching systems, and global high-bandwidth connectivity have all driven everything forward at great speed.

Gone were the days when a trainer could hide behind their expert role and predominantly act in an information-oriented way. It no longer worked to build an expert-layman relationship and impress participants with

scientific and often pseudoscientific insights. What was increasingly demanded were practical relevance and measurable results. The role of the showman, who tries to sell his own behavior to others as a recipe for success, no longer worked either, as companies were primarily interested in qualifying their employees and not in profiling their trainers.

In the past, the profession of trainer was not regulated by the state and there was no universally accepted job description. The training of trainers was not clearly defined, leading to numerous providers in this market segment with sometimes dubious programs that only benefited the organizer. The lack of access requirements for the profession attracted a range of individuals, from highly skilled training professionals to charlatans. While professional associations, quality watchdogs, universities, and various types of training institutes attempted to provide more transparency and offer a qualified trainer education through complex courses, professional certifications, quality seals, and industry-specific quality initiatives, they met with limited success.

As powerful AI algorithms developed, it became possible to create learning programs and coach systems in the cloud. These systems became a reality within three years and eliminated the justification for trainers' existence. The breakthrough of Google's DeepMind, the convergence of massive amounts of cloud computing, a large selection of virtual learning programs, excellent learning coach systems, and high-bandwidth global connectivity accelerated these developments.

Gone were the days when a trainer could hide behind their expert role and predominantly pursue an information-oriented approach. Establishing an expert-lay relationship and impressing participants with scientific and often pseudoscientific knowledge no longer worked. What was increasingly demanded were practical relevance and measurable results. The role of showman, who attempted to sell his own behavior to others as a recipe for success, also no longer worked, as companies were primarily interested in qualifying their employees rather than promoting their trainers.

New developments such as virtual, selective training and precision training became increasingly popular and displaced the supermarket principle of many seminar providers who tried to impress with a wide range of seminar offerings. Simply recycling foreign knowledge was no longer in demand. What was needed were practice-oriented learning situations with a high level of didactic quality.

Under the market conditions at the time, managers were challenged to make more unpopular decisions than ever before. Most of these decisions were necessary because industrialized countries were undergoing a socio-economic and technological structural change that placed the highest demands on companies. The increasing globalization and the resulting often ruinous competition as well as the information overload constantly brought new problems that needed to be quickly and adequately resolved. The training responsibilities in companies quickly learned to ask about the concrete benefits for the employees and the clear link to the company's goals. Teaching and learning systems that focused on experience transfer,

competence development, and performance improvement became increasingly important.

THE LABOR MARKET IN TURMOIL

Many employees worked from home and did not want to return to the corporate rat race. Others completely said goodbye to the working world or chose self-employment. This brought the labor market into turmoil, and the fight for talent began. Companies hoped to welcome their employees back to the office, but a considerable percentage of employees preferred to resign rather than return to the office. Executives asked: Is working from home good for corporate culture? They feared that flexible work arrangements would make it difficult to maintain their current culture. AI platforms provided the solution to the problem. With virtual learning programs, coaching systems, and digital assistants, "home workers" were elevated to a higher level. Through selective online training, they could be developed into specialists and thus become more valuable to the companies.

THE END OF TRAINERS

How long did it take for trainers and coaches to be replaced by virtual programs?

The transition took place within three to four years. It was a smooth transition. First, the large companies took the step towards AI-driven training and were surprised at how smoothly everything worked. As the systems became more affordable, the medium-sized companies followed, and eventually the small businesses as well.

The successful and flexible trainers and coaches realized that the future was approaching much faster than they had anticipated. To avoid being overtaken by the future, they looked for market niches where they could anchor themselves. Some of these new tasks were:

- **Conducting company-specific needs analyses**
- **Developing future company goals**
- **Developing problem-oriented simulations**

- **Moderating conflict management meetings**

Everything that the big AI systems didn't want to handle was left for the trainers, coaches, and consultants, and that wasn't much. Most of them, therefore, looked for new careers.

THE SUCCESS FACTORS

What made the AI-driven systems so successful?

There were many reasons why companies switched to the new technologies and parted ways with their trainers, coaches, and consultants. Artificial Intelligence (AI) was a much-discussed topic in business circles at the time. The majority of experts and futurologists claimed that AI would be our future. Although the technology was still in its early stages of development, many companies were already investing huge budgets in AI. This changed learning and development rapidly. Learning programs became personalized, and individual learning styles were taken into account. Employees achieved their learning goals faster as

personalization fostered engagement. AI learning systems analyzed every learner and presented content based on their performance levels. The learning process was optimized and fully automated.

Faster, sustainable learning led to better learning outcomes. Return on Investment (ROI) and the Value of Investment (VOI) of learning investments experienced enormous increases, and that motivated companies to completely switch to AI learning systems.

Integrating training and learning into everyday work was another factor that convinced companies of the benefits of AI systems.

The measurement of learning effectiveness was the next big step that the AI systems tackled. Top management no longer had to accept the self-analysis of trainers and coaches. It was generally known that this form of self-analysis was mostly based on self-deception. AI transformed educational control into a neutral and independent entity, which gave more credibility to training and development.

Another important success factor of AI systems was accessibility. Programs were available anytime and anywhere in all languages through cloud services and could easily be adapted to transcultural needs.

However, the strongest factors were the AI-based digital coaching systems and personal virtual assistants that largely replaced trainers, coaches, and consultants.

AI systems have revolutionized many areas. But what turned the economy upside down was the parallel development of robots that took over all the work that humans did not want to do. These robots were used for boring, dangerous, or dirty jobs.

Companies were able to address the shortage of workers by using AI-powered robots. These robots became a reality due to the convergence of robotics, cutting-edge sensors, new materials, speech recognition, and quantum computing.

Soon after, a new generation of humanoid avatars followed, which were so realistic that they conveyed the feeling of interpersonal

contact. As a result, digital coaching systems and virtual assistants became unbeatable.

ROI AND VOI EVALUATIONS

How has the human capital movement evolved?

Between 2018 and 2022, the Return-on-Investment (ROI) method became established in personnel development. Thousands of training departments, external institutes, and freelance trainers around the world regularly conducted ROI measurements to document the financial value of their training projects for management. Critics of this method claimed that ROI calculations in personnel development were not very informative since they were only carried out project-specific and ignored the big picture, namely the impact of training measures on corporate strategy and goals.

That was actually true. Most ROI calculations only related to the short-term financial results of development projects. Experts believed that project-specific evaluations missed the point completely. What really mattered were

the positive changes in the company's valuation. CEOs cared little about the short-term cost-benefit ratio of training projects. The ROI for a project could even be negative as long as the results made a measurable contribution to the company's valuation. What CEOs really wanted to know was how they could prove to shareholders that a particular training project had a sustainable impact on profitability. If the value for shareholders declined, as shown by a lower valuation of the shares, this would also have an immediate impact on personnel development. In this case, training measures would be considered ineffective. When shares lose value, top managers and not least personnel developers often lose their jobs as well, as cost-cutting measures are needed to stop the negative financial trend.

THE STAKEHOLDER PRINCIPLE

The stakeholder principle is the idea that all parties who have an interest or stake in a company should be considered when making decisions, not just the shareholders who own the company. Critics in the past believed that

only the shareholder perspective was important and that stakeholders were secondary. However, over time, the human capital perspective has become more widely accepted and understood by personnel developers.

It is important to take a medium- to long-term view of the concrete effects of training projects on company goals. However, an unbalanced, benefit-oriented approach that considers all players in the process as equally important is necessary to achieve a significant value contribution. The one-sided focus on shareholders and their profits actually has negative effects on all other parties involved. Positive value contributions depend on well-motivated employees and managers. If the benefit expectations of these two groups are not or only insufficiently taken into account, significant performance losses can occur that cannot be eliminated even by the best training program.

Conducting a targeted benefit analysis before the start of an important training project can convert benefit expectations into value drivers. Employees and managers who fully

support a training or development project are almost a guarantee of its success. If the project also focuses on developing the necessary competencies required to achieve company goals, a significant value contribution is within reach.

Unfortunately, many companies fail to establish a clear connection between competency development, performance improvement, and value contribution.

VALUE OF BENEFIT ANALYSES

Numerous training projects are conducted without first consulting employees and managers about their expectations. This has led to many disinterested and unmotivated participants in seminars and workshops. However, AI has solved this problem by incorporating a benefit-oriented approach to personnel development from the beginning in all virtual learning systems.

When employees and managers understand how important measurable value contributions are for company valuation and

how they also affect the realization of their benefit expectations, they quickly become allies who are willing to give their best and achieve top performance. The value of human capital increases as training, product development, production methods, pricing, and quality become important competitive factors. AI system developers recognized early on that the programs they developed must lead to measurable results and performance improvements if they want to significantly change training. Therefore, they focused on developing only the skills that are really needed to make a value contribution to the company's goals.

This required a significant rethink. The benefit-oriented approach is not easy to implement because important prerequisites must first be created. As the tech giants had hired the best training professionals, the benefit-oriented training was quickly implemented and thus significantly upgraded human capital.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM DESIGN

So, what does the research and development center look like now?

Peter explained: "You'll be disappointed if I show you another black room. However, this one has some additional technological features. For example, we can quickly design prototypes for customized learning programs here and test their effectiveness with a group of around 1,000 online testers. We also have access to external teams and specialized databases for creative input and visualization. Our own developers also work with subject matter experts who are responsible for the quality of the content. The didactic optimization is done through an AI developer module in the cloud."

What were the main insights that led to all of these significant changes?

In a 2021 survey conducted by ITD International, over a thousand training professionals named their five biggest challenges. At the top of the list were the value of investment and return on investment of training measures. Second was the time pressure associated with continuing education projects. Next was the lack of management identification with training and development measures. Only in fourth place were shrinking budgets mentioned. In fifth place was keeping up with best practices.

AI PROBLEM SOLVING

With the development of AI, all of these problems were solved. At the beginning of the transformation process, training was systematically dismantled in favor of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning could largely be integrated into the work process and supported by virtual coaching systems. These changes did not simply come about because learning technology improved significantly. They were driven by progressive organizations that recognized that learning in advance is not the most successful method. With the help of AI systems, learning content could be offered in the right doses at the right time when it was really needed.

Furthermore, employees increasingly asked for self-directed learning. Continuing education professionals therefore worked feverishly to give informal learning more space without losing control. Informal learning only produces measurable results, they argued, if it is properly structured and professionally guided and controlled at every stage.

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES

Several studies within benchmark companies have shown clearly that it is also possible to achieve valuable learning gains and competency and performance improvements without the structures and controls of personnel developers and trainers. Whenever the right means and methods are provided for an exchange of experiences, a valuable learning gain occurs, and competency and performance improvements are achieved that cannot be achieved through training alone. Since training takes place mainly in an artificial atmosphere - with the exception of highly developed practical simulations - it cannot keep up with the performance-enhancing experience and know-how transfer that takes place in informal performance teams.

SYNCHRONIZATION

Another important insight was that companies place extreme value on their corporate strategies and goals being clearly in line with the performance goals and performance management. This is where personnel developers and performance consultants are

called upon. Making the connection between training and business is not a one-time task. It is rather a continuous process that requires the full attention of training and performance professionals. If this connection is not made, important resources are wasted, and unnecessary training and development work is done. The results are often budget cuts and job cuts in the training department. AI systems have also taken over this function.

EXPERTISE IN DEMAND

Before the advent of AI systems, it was extremely important to involve top management in training and development projects in a timely manner. However, personnel developers were often convinced that it could also be done without the involvement of management. They believed they knew the business processes well enough to implement useful solutions. Often, they did not choose the most technically competent managers but rather those who were easiest to convince or who were available at the time. By choosing the easy way and not subjecting their projects to critical fine evaluation by top management,

their projects lost credibility from the outset. From practice, it is known that many employees are rather skeptical about training and development measures. However, when they see that top management fully supports a project and attaches great importance to it, they are more inclined to actively support the project. This higher degree of identification contributes significantly to the success of a training or development measure.

Successful companies have transitioned from leaving the goal setting of training projects to the human resources developers and instead have transferred it to a project manager or project team on the executive level. By personally overseeing the goal setting of a project, top management was also able to provide measurable objectives and tangible foundations for the human resources developer.
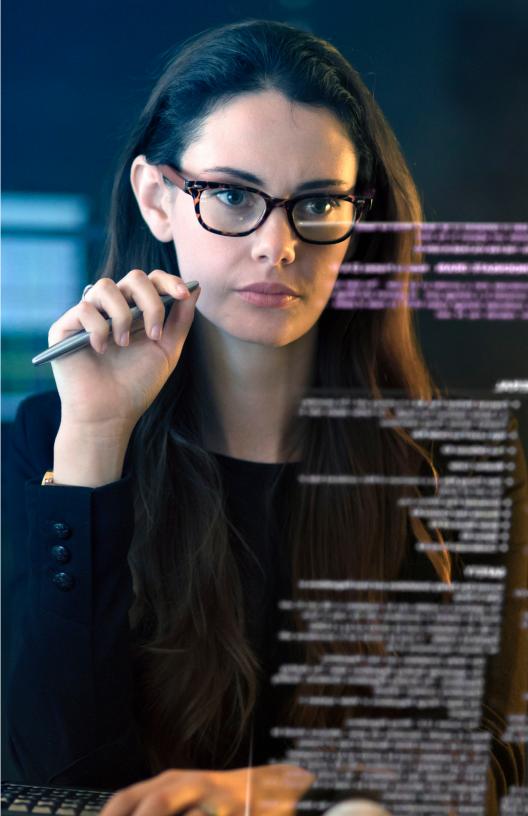
CHALLENGES

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS

Progressive human resource developers at that time believed that training, development, coaching, and mentoring were part of every manager's job but were not fully realized. They argued that the pride of the managers played a major role in this.

THE MANAGEMENT STUDY

A survey of 300 top managers at General Electric yielded astonishing results. 90% of the respondents said that coaching from their managers was the most important factor in their personal development. Only 10% attributed their success to formal training or other development measures. In short, these top managers believed that the quality of coaching, training, and mentoring they received from their own managers was the most important contribution to their success.

APPRENTICESHIP

Since ancient times, professional experience has been passed down from one person to another. Skills were thus passed down from one generation to the next through apprenticeships. Historical records clearly show that skills were transmitted in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in this way. In those times, when young people achieved the status of an experienced craftsman, they were considered valuable members of society. With the industrial revolution, there were also significant changes in the training of young professionals. Today's system is certainly not perfect, but it ensures that a good basic education is imparted in all important professions. But after that, the thread usually breaks. To continue to develop, employees and managers attend seminars and workshops, learn for storage, and often cannot apply what they have learned in practice because the environment is not prepared and prevents the transfer to practice.

MANAGERS AS CO-TRAINERS

That is why workplace learning was developed. But that brought completely new requirements for managers. They were appointed co-trainers or performance coaches overnight without receiving the necessary training. Human resource developers and trainers tried to transfer transfer responsibility to managers. Managers must take their special responsibility for training and developing their employees, the developers demanded. Basically, this demand is justified. However, it cannot be done without close cooperation between human resource developers and managers. A new interface had to be developed here to ensure that seminar participants were seamlessly taken over by managers upon their return to the workplace to immediately implement the newly learned behavior in practice.

Some American corporations, such as Dell, Time Warner, General Electric, and Capital One, have fully recognized the benefits of teaching managers and have established training programs for their managers to develop their teaching skills. As with any new

development, there were of course opponents who argued that managers should manage and not be involved in training. Training should be provided by trainers. They should develop better transfer methods to ensure learning success and not distract managers from their actual work.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management has become an increasingly important aspect of leadership in many companies. Instead of relying solely on training and development programs, companies are investing in performance improvement measures to increase employee and customer satisfaction and improve the quality of their products and services, which ultimately leads to increased profits.

The role of the manager has evolved into that of a performance coach, focusing on improving the skills and competencies of their team members, and helping them achieve their goals. This shift in focus has allowed managers to play a more active role in the development of their employees, and to take

a more holistic approach to improving their overall performance.

Through performance management, managers are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their team members, and provide targeted support and coaching to help them improve. This not only benefits the individual employee, but also the organization as a whole, by increasing productivity, reducing turnover, and improving customer satisfaction.

Overall, performance management has become an integral part of leadership, as it allows managers to take a more proactive role in the development of their employees and the success of their organization.

LEARNERS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

What did learner-centered education trigger and how did the change take place?

The term "learner-centered" has been circulating for years, but almost nothing has changed. Seminar rooms were still filled. What stood in the way of a transition to a learner-

centered approach? First of all, misunderstandings and of course also persistence had to be overcome.

Some of the misunderstandings were:

- Learners need more time to achieve learning objectives
- Cooperative learning methods are time-consuming and expensive
- Participants need special skills to work with cooperative learning techniques
- Learner-centeredness is only for talented participantsLearners cannot acquire new content on their own
- Learners cannot acquire new content on their own
- Learners who work at their own pace may easily fail
- The learner-centered approach is weak because it lacks authority

The learner-centered approach has been around for years, but little has changed. Seminar rooms are still filled, and there were misconceptions and resistance to a shift

towards a learner-centered approach. Some of the misconceptions included the idea that learners need more time to achieve learning goals, cooperative learning methods are time-consuming and expensive, learners need special skills to work with cooperative learning techniques, learner-centered approach is only for talented learners, and learners cannot acquire new content on their own.

The COVID-19 crisis has dramatically changed the way we teach and learn, and many who have never taught online before were surprised and unsure how to implement online learning and assess learners.

However, most training providers have maintained a traditional structure for their online training, while some tried to replace the old pattern with something new, such as competency-based online learning, but found it challenging to assess learner success. Therefore, they returned to their proven methods. Most training professionals recognized the need for fundamental changes, but they lacked the skills to make the transition.

However, developments continued, and learners quickly learned to take control of their learning by accessing online learning modules, mini-courses, chat rooms, face-to-face programs via Zoom and Skype, virtual coaching, online project teams, augmented reality programs, and much more. Learners could work online with other participants on projects and review others' work. They could submit their own projects for review by colleagues or learning facilitators, and these assessments led to better results. Participatory performance assessment is crucial for collaborative learning. Reviewing other learners' work leads to discovering different styles and opinions, and expands one's mental horizon.

Learners are more engaged and successful when challenged to find their own solutions. The problem is that online trainers are trying to keep up with the traditional model and not utilizing the tools that are truly relevant.

Marketing experts in the education industry predicted in 2022 that the trend towards a learner-centered approach would accelerate

and soon replace more than 70% of all seminar activities.

Here is a brief summary of how this trend has changed the training and learning environment:

- Learning spaces have been optimized for online learning.
- Trainers have become learning coaches and mentors.
- Competency-based learning has replaced training.
- Project-based learning has increased engagement.
- Standardized learning programs have become more prevalent.
- Augmented and virtual reality programs have been developed.
- Experiential learning has accelerated the learning process
  "Do it yourself" mindsets have become more prevalent.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

SURVIVAL PROGRAM

What did the training professionals do back then to survive, and what were the success factors?

Peter explained the six most important measures.

Adaptation to the new market situation

The digital age is characterized by rapid changes and new trends. Trainers and HRD professionals must be able to quickly integrate new technologies and methods to remain relevant and effective. This combination of technical, didactic, agile, and communicative skills, as well as data- and technology-based decision-making, requires a new job profile and professional image for training professionals.

Acquiring new competencies

To fully leverage digital didactics, new competencies are required. Trainers and HRD professionals need to have an understanding of the specific needs and challenges of digital learning environments and be able to develop and implement digital learning strategies. Communication with participants through digital platforms is different from traditional contexts. Trainers and HRD professionals must be capable of communicating effectively and engagingly online and providing constructive feedback.

Specializing in niche activities

In the digital era, it is important to specialize in niche activities to survive in the competition. Here are some relevant niches:

- Digital transformation and implementation of digital technologies in companies
- Development of online programs and learning support

- Agile project management for company-specific learning programs
- Data analysis using AI-based programs
- Data analysis using AI-based programs and data protection

These are just a few examples. Niches sometimes change suddenly, so it is important to constantly update oneself to remain successful.

Optimization of analysis methods

The implementation of AI-based programs can significantly improve the optimization of analysis methods in education controlling by automating and accelerating the conduct of Return on Investment (ROI) and Value of Investment (VoI) analyses. These programs can process large amounts of data faster and perform complex analyses, which improves the efficiency and accuracy of the results. They can also identify patterns and trends in the data that are difficult for an analyst to detect. Coaches and consultants should

familiarize themselves with "big data" programs and learn to use Open AI platforms.

Objectification of Results Control

External trainers and consultants can position themselves as training controllers and offer their clients objective results controls for training projects. Through their independent perspective, they are also able to provide recommendations for optimization. This can help to make training investments more effective and efficient and to achieve better results.

External training control provides an independent, objective perspective for assessing the results of training projects and provides both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. By using external experts, the problem of self-deception, which is often the result of self-evaluation, can be avoided. This contributes to better decision-making and more efficient use of resources.

Focus on Business Results

Training and development projects must make a measurable contribution to the company's goals in order to be considered justified. Developing competencies alone is not enough. It must lead to improved performance and concrete results that directly contribute to the success of the company. It is of the utmost importance that training and development programs are linked to the company's goals.

This ensures that investments in training directly contribute to the implementation and achievement of the company's goals. It is not enough to optimize the competencies of employees alone. Business results must improve and the performance of the company must be increased through the interventions. External performance consultants can lead management and training responsibility to success.

THE AWAKENING

That was the last question I could ask Peter before the shrill sound of the alarm clock ended my dream. Back in the real world, I took stock of what I had experienced in my dream and tried to use a reality check to determine whether it was all science fiction or whether it contained truths that required immediate action.

After a thorough analysis, I came to the conclusion that all of these developments are already underway, will soon become reality, and will revolutionize further education, business coaching, and performance consulting. I also realized that everything will happen faster than we think.

THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kellner is the President and CEO of ITD International and the United States Online University. He holds academic degrees in Psychology and Communication from German and American universities. Dr. Kellner has served as a professor at Clayton University (founded by Harvard University), New York University, and Pepperdine University. He has been a pioneer in competency research and development in Europe and is the international best-selling author of the award-winning STAR Competency Assessments, which has sold over 1 million copies worldwide. He has authored twelve books and numerous articles in the field of Human Resource Development.

For several years, Dr. Kellner has focused on developing a virtual university. He leads the Future Forum of the United States Online University, where training experts exchange new ideas, research results, and innovative concepts on how digital technologies can be used to optimize self-directed learning and virtual competency development, as well as performance improvement.