



The Expertise Economy

How the Smartest Companies Use Learning to Engage, Compete and Succeed

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

The workplace is going through a large-scale transition involving digitization, automation and acceleration. Critical skills and expertise are imperative for companies and their employees to succeed in the future, and the most forward-thinking companies are being proactive in adapting to this shift in the workforce.

The Expertise Economy describes how some of the smartest companies in the world are making learning and expertise a major competitive advantage. Authors Kelly Palmer and David Blake provide the latest scientific research on how people really learn. They offer examples of companies in Silicon Valley and worldwide that are driving the conversation about how to create experts and align learning innovation with business strategy. They include interviews with people from top companies, thought leaders in learning and education, as well as Thinkers50 list-makers such as Daniel Pink and others.

The Expertise Economy dares you to let go of outdated and traditional ways of closing the skills gap, and challenges CEOs and business leaders to embrace the urgency of reskilling and upskilling the workforce.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why traditional company training no longer works.
- To personalize learning and inspire employees to learn every day.
- To combat content overload and choose the right technology for your organization.
- To speak “the language of skills” in order to make the most of expertise.



by Kelly Palmer
and David Blake

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE EXPERTISE ECONOMY

by Kelly Palmer and David Blake

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Introduction

The world of work is going through a large-scale transition — much like the transition we went through from the agricultural economy to the Industrial Revolution. We are now in the age of digitization, automation and acceleration — an age where critical skills and expertise will be an imperative for us to succeed in the economy.

A 2018 McKinsey Global Institute report makes it abundantly clear that the workforce is not prepared for the disruption that's upon us: "Sixty-two percent of executives believe they will need to retrain or replace more than a quarter of their workforce between now and 2023 due to advancing automation and digitization."

If CEOs and business leaders are relying on a "hire only" strategy to get talent with the skills they need for their future, they will have to think again. Even the best universities are increasingly failing to prepare students with the skills they need to meet companies' hiring requirements. Today, the vital skill set for success includes learning agility (the ability to learn new things quickly), collaboration and teamwork, perseverance, curiosity and the ability to question the world around you. If you aren't ready and willing to learn every day and keep up with a rapidly changing world, you can't and won't stay competitive.

No one knows for sure what skills are going to be needed for the future, so companies need to create an environment where employees are continuously learning new skills: upskilling and reskilling themselves at the same rate that things are changing. Learning should be built into the work that employees already have, not something that they do separate from work.

Learning is complicated and messy. It's not enough to offer support to your employees on their learning

journey; you also have to create the right environment for employees to take ownership of what and how they learn.

To understand how to do that, it's important to review the latest scientific research on how people really learn. ●

How We Really Learn

The truth is that people learn when they care. So how do you get people to care? Researcher Bror Saxberg believes the first step is to understand that each person is comprised of a unique mix of cognitive capabilities and motivations. That means if you expect people to learn, then you need to know what makes them tick from both a cognitive and motivational perspective.

Adult educator Malcolm Knowles did the first extensive research on adult learning and found that an adult's strongest motivators are internal (intrinsic) rather than external (extrinsic). Knowles also discovered that adults need to know *why* they have to learn something.

In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel H. Pink talks about human motivation in terms of autonomy, mastery and purpose. He defines these concepts in the following way: autonomy is our desire to be self-directed; mastery is our urge to make progress and get better at what we do; and purpose is our yearning to contribute and to be part of something larger than ourselves.

These intrinsic motivators are extremely important when it comes to learning and work, yet most companies employ learning and talent strategies that are, in fact, the opposite of what science tells us is most effective.

Instead of autonomy and choice, they have a command-and-control model for telling employees what and



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when they need to do and learn (including the dreaded compliance training). Instead of mastery and competence, companies appear to be satisfied that employees have completed “training” regardless of whether they have actually learned anything or developed new skills.

Getting Practical About Learning

So what is the best method to help employees learn? Whether we want people to gain knowledge or learn new skills, there is a simple “Learning Loop” that everyone goes through if they really want to learn. The Learning Loop is a straightforward way of thinking about the learning process and has four components: knowledge, practice, feedback and reflection.

For example, let’s say Emily is starting a new job at a public relations firm right out of college. In her first week of work, she’s learning about her role and familiarizing herself with how everything works in her new work environment. This is the knowledge part of the Learning Loop. Next, she starts to do real work, partnering with more experienced account managers (practice) and maybe sitting in on some client meetings to observe her colleagues in action.

During these first weeks, Emily receives feedback from her boss and her peers about her progress. Emily reflects on the feedback, adjusts her actions in real time, and also gains confidence that she is learning and moving in the right direction.

Here are other ways you can help your employees learn and build expertise:

Model mindset and apply the right motivators.

Let employees know that your company prefers “learn-it-all” employees rather than “know-it-all” employees, and make sure leaders and employees model this behavior. Think about the intrinsic motivations of employees, such as autonomy, mastery and purpose, and let employees take ownership of their own learning.

Have employees assess skill gaps. Helping employees understand their strengths, weaknesses and skills gaps adds incredible value. How do they know what skills they want to build if they don’t know where they want to go, the type of skills they need, the skills they have or the level of those skills?

Encourage autonomy with your employees. People really crave autonomy. If you want to provide an environment where employees can be autonomous, it’s important to focus more on what work gets done, not how it gets done. Also, build trust with your employees. If you don’t trust them to work autonomously, then why hire them?

Encourage more reading and fewer lectures. Some of the most well-respected leaders of our time are avid readers. Warren Buffet, Oprah Winfrey, Sheryl Sandberg and countless entrepreneurs learn through reading.

Let’s now talk about seven guiding principles for how you can help your employees build the skills that are so critical to the success of your company, now and in the future. ●

1. Make Learning a Competitive Advantage

More and more companies are focusing on the power of learning — not only because it benefits employees but because developing employees just makes good business sense. Tesla, General Electric, Airbnb and Goldman Sachs are a few examples of companies that have focused on learning to provide essential development to their leaders.

Other companies would do well to follow their lead. Research from Deloitte shows that high-impact learning organizations achieve three times the profit growth over a four-year period than companies that do not follow a similar approach.

Building a culture of learning does not have to be a case of reinventing the wheel. In fact, most companies operate in cultures that already encourage some level of learning or have mastered a mixture of learning cultures. For example, companies with a **culture of compliance training** tend to place a high value on ensuring that their employees adhere to the regulations and requirements necessary to do business. A **necessary training culture** focuses on teaching employees about highly job-specific tools and processes.

A **learning culture** goes beyond compliance and necessary training. At its core, a culture of learning aligns employee development with organizational goals. In a **culture of continuous learning**, learning becomes part of people’s everyday work and a regular part of their day. In this way, it becomes a daily habit.

A culture of continuous learning is a culture where employees can learn in their own time and their own way through accessing all types of both formal and informal learning, including videos, articles, podcasts, books and even attending events. But more than just the myriad learning that surrounds us every day that helps us build skills for now and for the future, learning in a continuous-learning culture becomes something that people love to do and want to do, rather than something they dread.

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Once you have built a positive culture designed to encourage autonomy and self-direction, you can start to develop the concept of continuous learning in your workplace. Here are several ways to cultivate this learning environment:

Think about the type of learning organization you want. Employees really want to grow and develop in their careers, and we need to enable, nurture and encourage that. What kind of skills do they want to develop? How do they want to learn? Engaging your employees and bringing them into the discussion will encourage them to embrace further learning.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Make sure the message is embedded not only in your company's mission, vision and values but also in everything you do, so that everyone is fully aware that learning is entrenched in your culture.

Provide your employees with the learning resources they need. These resources may come in the form of online courses, subscriptions to audiobooks, access to podcasts or a video learning library. Show support by giving them dedicated time during the working day to learn.

Understand employees' career goals. Managers need to check in with their employees regularly to gain a better understanding of their career goals, strengths, areas for development and the short- or long-term goals they want to achieve.

Relate learning goals to the bigger picture. Take time to explain to employees why learning is so important. It needs to make sense for them on a personal level and on a company level. How will their learning impact their personal career path? And how does it contribute to organizational goals and the vision and mission of the company?

Make sure to follow up. This might involve asking your employees what they thought of the activity (good and bad), if it met their expectations and how they could apply this new learning to their roles. ●

2. Embrace Personalized Learning

Corporate training is often modeled on the notion of the “standard” or “average” person; but, according to Todd Rose, director of the Mind, Brain and Education graduate program at Harvard, there is no such thing as an average person, an average education or even a standard way that people learn. Companies need to move away from the one-size-fits-all, standardized learning model and personalize

every single employee's learning experience. For learning to succeed, it has to take place on the individual level.

Companies need to start empowering their employees and understand that employees should be driving the conversation around learning.

Personalized Learning in Action

For personalized learning to succeed, the company must support it and create an environment where the employee can succeed. While employees need to take responsibility for their learning and career development, managers should provide feedback, advice and guidance.

Rico Rodriguez, a 30-year-old software developer and learning enthusiast, studied neuroscience at Yale but decided against a career in neuroscience. Instead, he took a job as a sales rep at eLearning company Moodlerooms, straight out of college. That led him to his next role, as a sales effectiveness associate in the Offers group at Google, where he helped sales reps generate consistent, high-quality leads.

While Rico was coaching sales reps, he realized there was a limitation in Google Spreadsheets that made it difficult to carry out some of the analysis requested by managers, so he started thinking about a solution. He decided he would learn how to code, beginning with the Python programming language. But he also felt he needed a mentor to help advise him, so he found someone at Google whom he respected and who was willing to give him some guidance around learning this new skill.

Once Rico learned Python, he suggested to his manager that he apply his new skill to a project that the engineers didn't have the bandwidth for: a calculator app that Google sales reps could use to replace the cumbersome spreadsheets. Rico's manager agreed to let him work on the project, and so Rico moved from sales to software development.

Two important factors impacted Rico's motivation and determination to move into software development. First, he had a manager who believed in him and his ability to learn new things, a manager who gave him the opportunity to do something new — in this case build the calculator application for the sales team.

Second, he found a mentor who gave him guidance about how his learning was progressing.

However, even with support, people must be motivated to learn in the first place. For example, nobody told Rico to learn to code in Python — he set his own goal and created a challenge that motivated him. From there, he followed the path toward personalized learning. ●

3. Combat Content Overload

Most experts predict that the size of the digital universe is at least doubling every two years (based on a 50-fold growth from 2010 to 2020). As a consequence of this content overload, we have become overwhelmed by the constant surge of information, impatient in our need for information “right now” and distracted by the never-ending stream of websites, apps and video clips.

All this information at our fingertips is a good thing, but only if we can help overwhelmed learners find what they need, the moment they need it. That moment of need usually happens on the job.

For example, say you need to figure out how to use data to tell a compelling story and present it to your boss the next day. You can't wait for a class on “Telling your Story with Data.” You need the information now. How great would it be if you could easily find what you want without wading through millions of search results?

Digital learning content is rapidly evolving, so it is important to understand what content is available, what's working, and where companies and employees are being successful. Low- and no-cost quality digital content is now so widely available that organizations simply cannot afford to overlook the learning content available.

For example, the free online video platform TED (Technology, Education and Design) provides access to a collection of short, impactful talks from thought leaders around the world. YouTube is another popular information source and offers a variety of instructional videos, unparalleled by any other media. The nonprofit Khan Academy has delivered more than one billion lessons online. The content is all free and is used by eight million learners monthly around the world.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) offer learners access to online lectures and assign homework that is graded by a computer. When the class and coursework have been completed, participants receive a certificate of accomplishment. There are also hundreds of subscription-based, paid online learning libraries on the market today.

Here are some ways you can help overwhelmed learners at your company.

Curate content. Say you want to learn more about cybersecurity. You could try googling it, but you have a colleague, Julie, who works in the engineering group at your company, and she is a subject-matter expert on this topic. You ask Julie what she thinks are the best learning resources surrounding cybersecurity. In response, Julie puts

together a list of courses, conferences, certificates, books, podcasts, websites, experiences, journals and articles that she thinks are the most valuable sources of information. Now imagine that you have technology that will let you put these resources in a guided digital pathway so that anyone who wants to learn about cybersecurity can also see the list of resources that Julie put together.

Do not create new content. When you think about creating content, find out if that content already exists either at your company or free on the internet. If you do this, you can then spend time creating content that is specific to your company or your expertise rather than duplicating content that is already high quality and serves the purpose.

Encourage employees to set learning goals. When employees set goals around their learning, they focus on what they should be spending their time on. For example, say Jenn wants to focus on learning more about business strategy. She could set a learning goal to outline how she might acquire this skill (books, podcasts, classes, mentoring, etc.). Then she could track her progress against her goal and even gain certification for that skill upon completion.

4. Understand the Power of Peers

Many managers and leaders tend to see learning as something that you do once, check the box and you are done. Want to make employees more culturally aware? Send them on a diversity training program. Managers not hiring the right people? Put them in front of a Power-Point presentation and get someone to lecture them on interviewing skills.

Research shows that the people taking part in these programs either resent being there in the first place or simply forget what they've been taught within the space of a couple of days or even hours. The point is that learning cannot be ordered up like a burger in a fast-food restaurant. There is no quick fix. Learning is about gaining new skills and knowledge from the people around us.

There is a different dynamic altogether in learning from our peers versus learning from someone in a superior position. When you work for someone, they ultimately have power over you — the power to help you with your career, to mentor you and champion your efforts, to impact your income and your yearly bonuses, and to promote you or fire you. These factors often inhibit us from saying what we want to say or speaking up when there is a concern.

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The other dynamic to peer learning is reciprocity. People receive feedback from the group for their own work, and they tend to put more time and energy into providing meaningful feedback on their peers' work as well.

Telecommunications company Ericsson holds a "Learning Week," during which employees can learn from others and teach what they know. People can sign up for sessions that they want to teach others about and either participate in the program online through collaboration tools or at an in-person meeting. For Ericsson, Learning Week has become a wildly successful strategy to encourage peer-to-peer learning. This is because the people sharing their expertise gain as much as the peers who participate.

The strategy for peer-to-peer learning isn't to lecture but to set up the learning so there is an opportunity to have meaningful conversations, to listen to different points of view, to get feedback and to reflect.

Creating a successful peer-to-peer learning environment takes time, but plenty of organizations have managed to achieve it by following these guidelines:

- **Appoint someone to facilitate the learning process.** People who have typically been instructors in instructor-led training programs are often great facilitators. Peer learning facilitators make sure everyone stays on topic, notes key ideas and themes, and keeps the conversation moving forward.
- **Focus on real-world situations** by giving the group a real problem to solve. The key to a successful peer-to-peer learning program is to ensure everyone taking part is engaged in something authentic to resolve.
- **Build a safe peer-to-peer learning environment** where participants feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts openly with their peers. Encourage empathy, active listening, sensitivity to feelings and needs, and engagement in emotional conversations.
- **Promote peer-to-peer learning** by holding inclusive events and conferences in person or online.
- **Encourage peer-to-peer networking** by setting up online social networks, organizing networking events or setting up informal learning groups that meet regularly and exchange ideas (even over a few beers!).

5. Succeed with the Right Technology

Many companies choose technology before really understanding how it can address the business problems they are trying to solve. For example, someone thought it would be a great idea to take a classroom lecture and put

it online. But, think about the worst professor you ever had in high school or college, and imagine putting his lectures on YouTube.

Although you have the technology to distribute a terrible lecture to millions of people, not many people will find this useful, inspiring or engaging. If it wasn't good in the first place, adding technology is not going to make it any better.

As learning scientist Bror Saxberg says, "Technology does nothing for learning. What technology does is take either a good learning solution or a bad learning solution and make it more affordable, more reliable, more available, more data rich and more personalized." In other words, technology is useless if you don't start with a solid foundation and strategy for what you want to do with learning.

We can make sense of it all if we start with "Why?" Why do you need the technology? What problem are you trying to solve?

Explore or Create Career Goals

For example, in 2011, Anne Fulton and her co-founder, Jo Mills, created career-pathing software solution Fuel50 with the mission of creating a meaningful workplace for people around the globe. Fulton describes Fuel50 as "Match.com meets LinkedIn." In other words, it matches people with career paths and internal opportunities and then connects them to others within the company who can help them succeed.

If you want employees to grow their careers inside your company, you need to connect them to opportunities available internally. Unfortunately, it's often easier just to look externally at new opportunities through LinkedIn. Fuel50 helps employees find the answers to questions such as "What am I best suited to here in this business?" "What role could I aspire to?" "How can I get from where I am today to where I want to be?"

One of the main goals of Fuel50 is to build a continuous growth culture and mindset within the business.

In the long run, companies should be thinking about creating a learning "ecosystem," which is a system that seamlessly integrates best-of-breed technologies for the problems that they want to solve.

Here are some ways you can succeed with the right technology:

Figure out your learning and talent strategy first. It seems like common sense, but work out what you want to do, what your strategy is and what business problems you are trying to solve before buying technology to support that strategy.

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Do your research. There is plenty of great information out there about what technologies are available to solve your particular problems, so keep up to date on what's new. Some great resources for this include *Harvard Business Review* and *Fast Company*.

Invest in adaptability more than efficiency. Let go of the fantasy of one integrated system that does everything, all in a simple, seamless application. Locking all your processes, content and users into one monolithic system won't help you adapt when requirements and priorities evolve or when new, better options emerge. And they will.

Focus on value, not price. Consider productivity gains, think about new possibilities, and factor in the time and work it will take to drive adoption and utilization.

Select a partner, not software. Push past the sales rep. No matter how slick the user interface looks or how easy the integrations sound, software won't transform your operations or make change stick. People will. Innovation takes vision, creativity and grit, but it also requires solving problems. So get to know the product as well as the engineering and client service people you'll be working with. ●

6. Analyze Skills with Data and Insights

With the help of data and analytics, we have the ability to understand our employees' current skills as well as the ones they are building. Data can also tell us the level of engagement in learning, how to make the best learning investment decisions and how learning can impact the business in significant ways.

Data can answer some of the critical questions leaders ask about training, such as

- Should we be spending this much money to train our employees?
- Is it making a difference?
- Was it worth the investment?
- What are employees learning on their own time and on the job that we aren't tracking?

Many successful learning leaders do not start out in the learning field. Instead, they often come from marketing, product development, product management, technology and corporate strategy.

Susie Lee, head of global business solutions at Degreed, started in business before moving to learning. In 2010, Lee moved internally from her role at Bank of America as vice president of product development and loyalty marketing

to senior vice president of global learning product management and implementations.

Lee noticed that by applying the principles of marketing and metrics to corporate learning, she was able to engage in meaningful conversations with business leaders about the learning patterns of employees. Lee believes one of the smartest things companies can do is look at corporate learning more holistically and think of learning as a business. In the simplest form, that means understanding your customers. But who are your learning customers in a corporation?

Ultimately (and this is where the shift in mindset is important), the customers are your employees. They are the ones who are doing the learning. That's why it's even more important to focus on learning data to give you insights about what skills your employees have and what learning they need to get the skills they need. Then, it's not about guesswork; instead, it's about data showing what employees really need.

Measuring What Matters with the Learning Analytics Model

Many companies apply the principles of the learning analytics model (LAM) to acquire information. This model shows you how to collect the right learning data, analyze that data to find powerful insights, tell a compelling story about learning at your company to help gain a competitive advantage, and provide actionable outcomes using this data.

Once you collect all the relevant data, it's time for analysis. The goal of analyzing the learning data is to help you figure out what it all means and get the answers you're looking for. Data can be collected at a variety of levels to tell a complete learning story: the industry level, company level, organizational/team level and the individual level.

With the help of the right data, you can tell a compelling learning story rather than just provide a spreadsheet of endless data. Storytelling can be a compelling way to tell the learning story and really share your understanding of the degree of talent in your organization. ●

7. Make Expertise Count

In the expertise economy, it's not important how you gain your expertise, just that you did. When we hire people, from within a company or externally, the question we should be answering is "Can this person do the job and how well?" In other words, we should be assessing people's abilities through the lens of skills rather than more

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conflated signals like the company a person worked for or a prestigious school they attended.

Skills are the things we can do. Mastery is how well we can do them. Can she program in Python? Can he think critically? Can she present? Can he analyze? If so, how well? Every job we ask someone to do is a compilation of individual skills.

Skills are the building blocks of a job and the building blocks of a company. For us to solve the labor market problems we have in this economy, we must begin speaking the language of skills and stop caring about pedigrees, logos, time spent learning, test-taking ability, interviewing skills or anything else. The first step to speaking this language is to think of your company as its own labor market.

Three simple questions can guide your progress toward being able to speak the language of skills:

- What skills do we have?
- What skills do we need?
- What could we do if we had this information at our fingertips?

Skills as a Currency

The labor market transacts in much the same way as any other market does, using currency to translate relative value to make the market more efficient. If skills are the unit of value in the labor market, then professional credentials are the currency. And there's the rub. The market is flooded with different credentials: professional designations from associations (e.g., CPA, PMI, CAN), micro-degrees, nano-degrees, company-specific certifications, open badges and, of course, the traditional college degree.

The problem with these credentials is that they all represent different things to different people. Some measure the completion of courses, while others measure knowledge; some measure time spent doing something, while others are simply meaningless.

It's alphabet soup out there. What we need is a single currency to measure any skill at any level, and provide workers, managers and recruiters with a common language with which to interact.

Measuring Skills

All organizations need to set standards to create a complete picture of how they are measuring and growing skills in particular roles. There are myriad taxonomies and tools available to help organizations find the answers to these questions by mapping job roles to skills. More and

more companies are turning to AI and machine-learning technologies with relational databases to make recommendations based on near real-time labor market and jobs data.

Many companies are also setting mastery levels for the skills they've identified for each role. The Lumina Foundation's Connecting Credentials rubric is a popular eight-level rubric that is applicable to any skill and serves as a useful way to set standards and measure mastery. Once those standards are set, you can train against and measure the results of your efforts.

Telus International, a global telecom company, is using the Lumina rubric built into Degreed to measure the specific skills obtained by 300 employees taking part in a formal training program. Following the program, which includes a combination of several modalities of learning, project-based learning and feedback sessions, everyone goes through a process to specifically measure and certify their skills.

The benefits of this process are twofold: Individuals receive certifications for the skills they have gained, while the company gets a better idea of the effectiveness of the training program and the skills obtained for that team. These results are then benchmarked against the job roles for each person to see how well they map onto the expectations and needs of the business.

In the expertise economy, we all have a responsibility to help teach and guide each other for our collective success. In the words of the American philosopher Eric Hoffer, "In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists." ●

MORE SV CONTENT ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Summary: *The Future Workplace Experience* by Kevin J. Mulcahy, Jeanne C. Meister. *The Future Workplace Experience* provides 10 rules for rethinking, reimagining and reinventing your organization. You'll gain a step-by-step process of recruiting top employees and building an engaged culture — one that will drive your company to long-term success.

Webinar: *Winning the Global War for Talent* by Gyan Nagpal. Nagpal decodes what it takes to attract, retain and develop today's employee. By focusing equally on Macro Trends and Micro Trends, he helps Talent Managers transform into forward-looking Talent Economists.