

The changing face of education

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Kerryn Kohl, co-founder of 4thTalent, recently spoke about developing competence for the future world of work as part of a series on the Future of Education run by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA).

Over the past few months, we've been pushed into a new way of being. Thanks to Covid-19, the digital revolution has been fast-tracked and, whether we were ready for it or not, we're now all scrambling to jump on board.



Kerryn Kohl

When it comes to learning, organisational behaviourist and learning strategist, Kerryn Kohl, believes we need to understand the technology that is available in the educational sector, and how it can help us change the way we learn.

Learning vs education

“When we founded 4thTalent, it wasn't with the vision in mind to improve on workplace learning, or the delivery thereof, but to truly make it a transformational process,” says Kohl.

She goes on to explain that transformation is one of the key things that sets learning apart from education. “Learning is a process of transforming, of really being able to make meaning of something, and understand how best we need to apply it to our lives.”

She contrasts this to education, which in the past has been training focused. “Our education system is based on rote learning and a stimulus response, without much thinking required.”

According to Kohl, corporates are stuck in the education approach, and in order to transform, we need to step into the realm of really learning, and dedicate ourselves to a multifaceted, lifelong approach.

Hyper-personalised learning

For 4thTalent, technology has provided an essential tool to help reimagine learning, one of the key advantages being that we can now hyper-personalise the learning experience.

“We're seeing ‘the click-based approach’ come through with a lot of the learning experience platforms (LXPs) on the market, which are providing opportunities for learning on demand,” says Kohl. However, she believes being able to choose from a wide range of digital content, and receiving recommendations based on simple and preference-based algorithms is simply not enough. “We need to take it to the next level, a level we've termed Hyper-Personalisation.”

This entails understanding exactly what a learner needs, what their gap in competence is, understanding their current level of proficiency and matching this to the learning content that will help them move that needle. This highly targeted approach to learning requires the combination of four key elements: centricity, orientation, reflection and measurement.

Centricity

4thTalent has developed a 4th-quadrant model to promote and develop centricity, and to ensure that learning drives performance. This model takes a two-tiered approach, by being both about the learner, and ensuring they have a wide variety of content to select from but also, by bringing organisations into the process by defining those competencies that

are going to drive performance for a learner in their current and future roles.

The first two quadrants of the model look at intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. “We focus on higher-order thinking skills and a learner’s ability to build relationships, as this is going to be key in the future.”

The third, or intradigital quadrant, is about learning to work within the digital world. It takes into account elements such as tech know-how, cybersecurity, database management, and a familiarity with the virtual world.

But for Kohl, it’s the fourth quadrant, which is about digital culture and digital affinity, that really sets theirs apart from other models. 4thTalent places a strong emphasis on the interdigital space, and encouraging learners to build relationships within the virtual world. “We’ve seen this come to the fore with learners having to step from a face-to-face world into a virtual one, and still having to perform, build relationships, and shift within the space.”

Orientation

The next key component is a learner being able to orientate themselves. “Often learners go into a situation knowing they have to upskill or relearn a particular skill, but they are very confused about where to start,” explains Kohl. She believes this is why when LXPs such as Coursera were launched, there was a great surge in uptake, but that the drop-off surged quickly, too. “The first issue is that learning requires work, focused time and investment to truly transform, but secondly, when we go on and curate learning for ourselves, we often start at the wrong level or don’t push ourselves out of our comfort zones.”

Kohl therefore believes that learners need to have access to the best available content out there, but also to have access to the level of learning they require.

Reflection

Without reflection, transformation is not possible. When we’re learning, we don’t always stop to think about the impact this new knowledge has on us, and the changes we need to make in relation to it. However, for Kohl, that reflection component is what moves us from theory into practice. “It’s essential that, as we reimagine learning, we build in time for reflection and reflective practice.”

Measurement

It is key for a learner to be able to understand not only what their starting point is, but also to continuously reflect and re-measure, so that they can understand the progress they are making. Every 4thTalent learner is therefore asked to complete a baseline evaluation so they are able to see where they need to start and what their unique learning profile is. They then go into a three-to-six-month learning journey, with content curated specifically for them. Post that learning cycle they are asked to re-evaluate, and based on that they can see the progress they have made. “Through a continuous process of learning and re-evaluation, we’re able to help that individual move through their learning cycle and drive a lifelong learning process.”

Case study | SAICA’s CA Pathways to Relevance Project

4thTalent is currently running a pilot project with SAICA, which is a great example of how we can bring tech into the learning space. The CA Pathways to Relevance project defines a competency framework for the accountant of the future, and outlines the different proficiency levels required across various potential career paths.

“We developed the competency framework with three core objectives in mind,” says Kohl. “Firstly, we introduced the new CPD policy, which is essentially around shifting from an hours-based metric system to looking at whether a learner has been able to transform. Secondly, we gave depth to reflective planning, and finally, we introduced the concept of lifelong learning.”

The project looks at possible roles accountants will need to play in the future, and breaks down the competencies associated with those roles, both currently, and in the future. “We came up with a set of competencies that are aligned to 10 separate career paths, and from that we could construct a hyper-personalised learning journey,” says Kohl.

Pilot learners could register, complete evaluations and then embark on a learning journey which was curated for them and weighted according to their gaps or unique learning profile. The programme has already had 880 registered members, and given that 4,957 assessments have been completed, it is set to provide a wealth of incredibly valuable data for future planning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kohl believes we absolutely need to reimagine the future and how we learn, by putting the experience back into the learner’s hands. “It’s up to us to create opportunities for learners in all industries to create their own learning process.”

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