effective. In addition, there are a range of formal learning much more robust and approaches can make a company's organizations help their people develop make dramatic improvements in how has actually never been better to We think, however, that the time longer equal to today's challenges.

That's right, Bill. And thank you, we are really pleased to be here. This is a topic of great relevance to us and to all of our clients in Accenture. We are seeing with our clients today a definite concern about how they are going to get the skills they need to implement their strategies. Many industries simply cannot solve this problem only through hiring because the skills they need are in short supply out there in the market. That means that, in many cases, organizations should now focus more intently on developing and reskilling the people they already have inside. And that takes us back to the statistics you quote—the fact that traditional approaches to training are no longer equal to today's challenges.

We think, however, that the time has actually never been better to make dramatic improvements in how organizations help their people develop the skills they need. New technologies and approaches can make a company's formal learning much more robust and effective. In addition, there are a range of informal approaches, especially what we call "social learning," that can effectively turn the entire organization into a just-in-time learning team. That's the concept summarized in the title of our article, "The Learning Enterprise." All people and all the knowledge in your entire organization (and outside of it, as well) are now potential sources of learning.

What is needed in that formal learning, however, is a more comprehensive approach, one that includes reinforcing mechanisms or what we call "chains" of learning experiences. If you start out in a classroom, or with other fairly static experience just giving workers some new knowledge, you should then quickly follow that up with some practice and simulation exercises. You want people to be able to discuss things and apply their knowledge. Then you might follow up with communications, coaching experiences, and so on.

That's the way we design our academies. They are learning solutions for workforces like supply chain, finance and so forth. We design an Academy so that the training content is tightly aligned to the skills needed by a particular functions and roles, so learning is tailored to real and relevant performance needs. Content can be continuously updated by an organization's internal experts as well as by academics and industry specialists.

Terry Nulty
If I may, let me add an additional important point to what Diego has just said. Here's a big challenge when it comes to social learning: It's easy enough to link your people to online content—anyone with a search engine can do that. But that's not exactly what we would call "learning." Sure, the Internet is the world's greatest source of learning but, to use the cliché, that's a bit like saying that a fire hose is the greatest source of drinking water.
What an organization needs is a way to filter all that content so that what is most relevant and valuable will appear to someone searching for that learning content. There are platforms that go a long way by enabling employees to rank courses, podcasts or videos. So if you search for something and you get a list of possible items, you can then see what your colleagues have said is valuable to them.

So does one always need to create this kind of customized technology platform for collaboration and social learning?

Definitely not. Of course, forms of informal and social learning like personal coaching do not necessarily require technology at all. But even for knowledge-sharing technologies, we often recommend that companies do not try to develop their own internal solutions or versions of platforms that are already widely accepted. If you want to have a system where you can post employee videos, why not just use the proven platform that YouTube has already developed? Or, if you want a social media learning solution, why not leverage the capabilities of Facebook?

I would also like to say that, although we often think that sophisticated learning solutions are targeted mostly at white collar workers or what we call knowledge workers, in fact, social learning can apply to almost any kind of job. For example, there is a chain of automobile repair shops in Spain that I know well. The company started a new social learning program, a mentoring system, to give employees skills to perform more sophisticated tasks. So if you are just starting out in this profession, performing jobs like fixing tires, you can get personal coaching to learn higher-level skills like repairing clutches. This mentoring program has had significant results for the company. For example, in this case they improved their overall shop floor productivity by more than 30 percent, which the company believes will potentially lead to a 20 percent increase in revenue.

That’s a good example. Terry, what are some recommendations as to how to make all this happen—to create really relevant, powerful learning experiences for employees?

There are a couple things I would emphasize. First, it’s important to conduct a kind of “inventory of skills” across your organization—who has what skills at what level. It’s fairly disconcerting to find in our research that only about half of the employees said their company has documented their skills. If you don’t have that level of awareness about what your employees do and do not know, you’re flying blind. So based on your organizational strategy, you then determine what skills you need to execute on that strategy, and then you inventory what you have. That assessment will help you determine what you need to do to close the gap between the skills you have and the skills you need.

Some of that gap is going to be filled through formal learning programs like the Academy. But not all of it. So, for informal or social learning to be effective, you also need another kind of inventory—an inventory of who are the real experts with regard to important parts of your business. Then, when people need advice or coaching about a job they are doing or a challenge they are facing, you can easily link them to experts around your organization.

The last thing I’d say is that it’s important to use a blend of learning experiences in your solution. In an Academy, as I said, there is formal instruction, but then experiences are reinforced through social learning opportunities. Blending provides variety, which makes for more effective experiences, but it also produces better retention and better practical application of ideas.

Diego, any final thoughts from you?

Yes, one very important point I wanted to make sure I put on the table. Although we’ve been talking here about the responsibility that organizations and businesses in general have to offer development opportunities for their employees, what we see as critical is that in fact people also have to take responsibility themselves for their own development and their own learning. They can’t be passive; they have to be active participants. Without that, there is no learning. Some of the best news coming out of the research is that employees really do want to learn; they want to acquire the new skills. Two-thirds of them, in fact, say that they have the primary responsibility for their learning and development. But they cannot do it alone, they need some guidance. A true learning enterprise knows how to bring the right learning experience to the right learning need—with relevant and very timely learning opportunities. That’s how you make a difference in your employee skills and it is how you keep the learning continuously relevant and aligned to the needs of your business.

Well, Diego De León and Terry Nulty, thank you for this interesting discussion on how your organization can become a “learning enterprise.”

Thanks to all of our listeners as well.

If you would like more information related to the topics we talked about in this podcast, or to learn how Accenture can help you achieve high performance, visit us on the web at accenture.com/managementconsulting or you can email us at consultingpodcasts@accenture.com. Thank you.

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