

Communities, Challenges, Curiosity, and Coaches - A Corporate Learner in 2030

Abstract: In 2030, many companies will no longer run Learning & Development departments. Instead, the focus will be on the 4 C's: Communities, Challenges, Curiosity, and Coaches. More self-responsibility for one's own development, more involvement in communities and practical projects, and continuous feedback from superiors, peers, and experts. A short journey into the future gives first insights into their implementation.

Peter is just on his way to the Community Center. For the past 3 weeks, he has been meeting with several partners to further develop the concept of mobility in his city. The partners working with him on the project come from very different areas, administration, schools, and banks, some are from small local businesses, some are self-employed, and some are even retired but are still interested in the future of their neighborhood. Today they have made an appointment with a Swedish expert from Uppsala to hear more about the experiences the Swedish have already gained in this area. Peter is thrilled about the meeting. And he is pleased to be allowed to work on this project during his working hours.

Peter is 35 years old and married. He serves as a data analyst in a large management consultancy with clients and projects worldwide. The opportunity to get involved in projects that are not part of his actual field of work was an important reason for him to join the consulting firm 3 years ago.

What used to be called learning and development was dissolved at Peter's consultancy several years ago. The colleague with whom he conducted the interview when he was hired instead spoke a lot about the four Cs: communities, challenges, curiosity, and coaches.

Communities, he said, were cross-project networks in which sometimes external parties such as business partners, freelancers, or experts participate. They took care autonomously of everything related to learning, knowledge-sharing, and innovations in their respective fields.

Challenges would be internal or external assignments for which employees can apply. However, his colleague immediately let it be known that it was highly expected that he would be part of these challenges. The commitment to local projects, he emphasized, was one of the company's top priorities, a focus to which his company has remained faithful to this day.

Curiosity is a response to the progression of AI and aims to allow employees to question routines and to never stop looking for new and better solutions. To measure the curiosity of its teams and employees, the company has developed a number of smart, internationally acknowledged parameters. They build on the curiosity scale developed by the German pharmaceutical firm Merck.

Coaches, finally, would help with any questions that might arise, for example, regarding the choice of communities, the extent of involvement, or the dissemination of experiences, in other words, issues where managers and teams quickly reach their limits as advisors. Peter was immediately hooked by this concept. Nobody here talks about learning or training anymore.

Peter was asked for an interview at the time because he had been active in various networks and projects since midway through his studies. LinkedIn was then already the platform on which many activities converged. Nowadays, in April 2030, it does so more than it used to do. Thanks to its sophisticated algorithms, the platform not only provides its users with information about open positions and projects but also automatically updates the profiles of its users, makes recommendations for new projects, connects with other members, offers courses on current topics, and curates information to pass on to its users. Depending on their needs and license, LinkedIn also integrates companies' internal networks into their recommendations.

Peter values these services highly. With the help of his speech assistant, he usually accesses the platform several times a day, asks questions, and conducts short dialogues to check his calendars, appointments, and contacts. He only continues to struggle with some features, which are too playful and competitive from his point of view, e.g., to translate activities into points, badges, lists, and rankings.

At the end of his studies 10 years ago, AI, algorithms, and bots were the big issues. But it was the pandemic in 2020 that triggered another major leap in development—not so much in terms of technology, but mainly in terms of working culture and attitudes. After the crisis, the principle of “digital first” had become established in many companies. In other words, since then, it has been taken for granted that exchange with others and cooperation in projects should take place online. Personal meetings on-site must be justified and approved.

Today, employees have a wide range of technical options available—from simple videoconferencing systems to meetings in sophisticated 3D environments, something that was still in its infancy 10 years ago as the so-called virtual reality. The carbon footprint is shown for all communication and collaboration channels and activities and is tracked for the company, teams, projects, and each employee. Yet, for the Community Center project, it was advisable to meet on-site, as some of the partners there are not as technically well-equipped as would be desirable.

At the Community Center, Peter arrives a little before schedule. He takes the opportunity to quickly adjust some keywords for a current project on his mobile. The new project with a Spanish and a German retail chain includes a few topics that he has heard about but has not yet dealt with directly. The new keywords ensure that the daily curated compilations he receives from LinkedIn and some other networks contain the “right” information: information that is directly tailored to him and his projects as well as references to people in his networks he can approach. The service adapts automatically to how Peter uses and evaluates these information bites.

Peter does not intend to rely entirely on one system. His employer, however, does not consider this a drawback. They appreciate the principle of “everything from one source.”

Also, many features of the platform depend on having access to relevant user data. The promise of “personal” information tailored to the user is as relevant today as it was 10 years ago. Despite this, Peter immediately signed up with his old university once they offered him membership and access to scientific information, further qualifications, and some special networks.

The moment Peter enters the conference room of the Community Center, the expert from Uppsala just happens to appear on the large wall screen.

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