

# People & Strategy

## Special Issue: Advances in Organization Design

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## From the Perspectives Editor

Anna Tavis, Perspectives Editor

In this issue's Perspectives, "The Future of Learning Systems," Randy Emelo paints a clear and thought-provoking picture of how our approach to learning needs to change to accommodate future social and business needs. It is not surprising that all of his respondents concur with him — and take it further. They insist that the "future is already here — it is just not evenly distributed."

If we approach learning as a socialization environment that graduates individuals who make wise judgments and are relationally connected, we are already living in this future state that Emelo describes so pointedly. He makes a strong statement that this "future present" learning is rapidly replacing the old formula of certification-based education that produces informed and loyal workers.

According to Emelo, the formula for this learning paradigm shift is quite transparent and consists of three central movements: from conformity to creativity; from information to wisdom; and from generalized to personalized learning. The outcome of this shift is that learning becomes more informal and self-directed, and it always occurs in a context.

Teresa Roche, the chief learning officer at Agilent Technologies, illustrates how the new learning system is already a reality at her company. At Agilent, global teams collaborate to produce innovation collectively and across the globe. The learning that Roche and her team promote is based on "rapid experimentation," where the company invites their clients to experiment, test and adopt new ways of learning and new tools.

Erik Gregory, who directs a graduate program at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, applies Emelo's new learning formula to the development of leaders. He cites Ron Heifetz's course on adaptive leadership taught at Harvard as espousing similar approaches as Emelo's. Gregory uses this emergent definition of learning to illustrate how one can get to the new definition of leadership as "mobilizing resources for change."

Stacy Harris, whose full-time job it is to research and analyze learning systems in the workplace, concludes that "multigeneration learning and development initiatives focused on learner-centric models are the most effective ones that deliver learning today [and] will be sustainably delivering results in the future."

Lastly, Kelvin Wong, a millennial and analyst in the talent and development function of a financial services firm, expresses his view on Emelo's thesis. Wong argues that Emelo does not go far enough in his statement about the need for new learning systems. He claims that the most distinct differentiator of talent these days is one's ability to integrate all types of learning and apply them broadly in different contexts. Wong provocatively claims that we are making a shift from the Information Age to the Globally Connected Age.

We invite our readers to read and discuss this exchange in your workplaces or in the classes you attend or teach and let us know where you stand on the important topic of the future of learning.

# The Future of Learning Systems

By Randy Emelo

What kind of workers and leaders do organizations need to develop to meet the challenges of the next 20 years? Will it be people who know the facts and are committed to the job, or will it be people who make wise judgments and are relationally connected? (See Exhibit 1 on page 7.)

Once we figure that out, we can design the right learning approaches and systems to address this imminent need.

While there will likely always be a place for workers like Person A, what we really need are workers and leaders who embody qualities of Person B. Creativity, relationships, generosity and wisdom are the must-have qualities we need to see in our workforce in the coming decades.

This begs the question: If we really do want to produce creative people, why are we still locked in training and education patterns

characterized by conforming, following directions and mastering content?

Think about it. Experts list out all the facts we want employees to learn, develop a curriculum, and then either mandate training or promote it as a way to get ahead of their peers — qualities of Person A. Part of the reason for this style of training is that our current educational system was formed at the end of the Agricultural Age and grew to

dominance in the Industrial Age as we needed more factory workers and factory leaders. When we moved into the Information Age, we simply used technology to make our old modes of instructor-led classroom training more efficient and accessible (think e-learning). However, curriculum-driven and certification-centric systems still govern the entire system as described in the left side of Exhibit 2 on page 8.

However, if we want to produce workers for the 21st century, we need people who are creative, connected, collaborative and flexible. And for this, we need a different approach to learning — one that is driven more by self-directed, collaborative learning experiences than organizationally directed, formal learning experiences.

### Three Movements of Connection-Based Learning

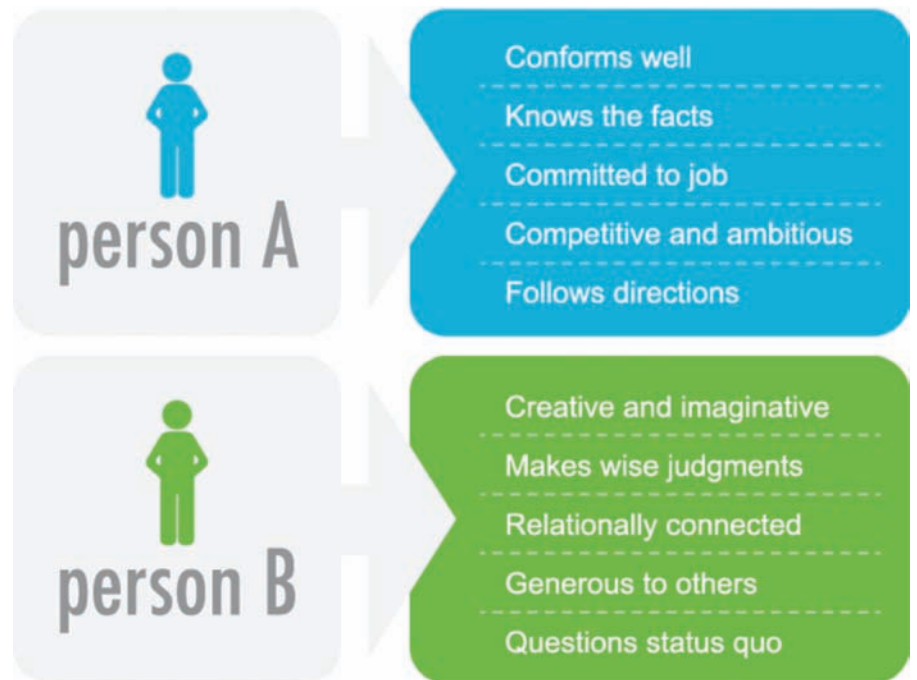
Three major movements are shaping the creation of this new connection-based learning paradigm, and each is pushing learning in the direction of relationally based, broadly networked, real-time, egalitarian relationships.

#### MOVEMENT 1 – FROM CONFORMITY TO CREATIVITY

In his insightful book “Linchpin” (New York: Penguin, 2010), Seth Godin says, “An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity, and boldness to challenge the status quo” (p.83). This openness produces people who are not afraid to challenge how things are typically done; they are always looking for ways to change things for the better. They seek to creatively connect people and ideas to form new solutions to the most pressing problems. They see the world more as artists — envisioning possibilities — rather than just as assembly line workers simply moving by rote as things come down the line. The fast-paced, ever-changing business world of the next 20 years will need more artisans and fewer factory workers.

**Learning Impact:** *More Informal Learning Opportunities*

#### EXHIBIT 1: WHO IS BEST SUITED FOR THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES OF THE NEXT 20 YEARS?



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#### MOVEMENT 2 – FROM INFORMATION TO WISDOM

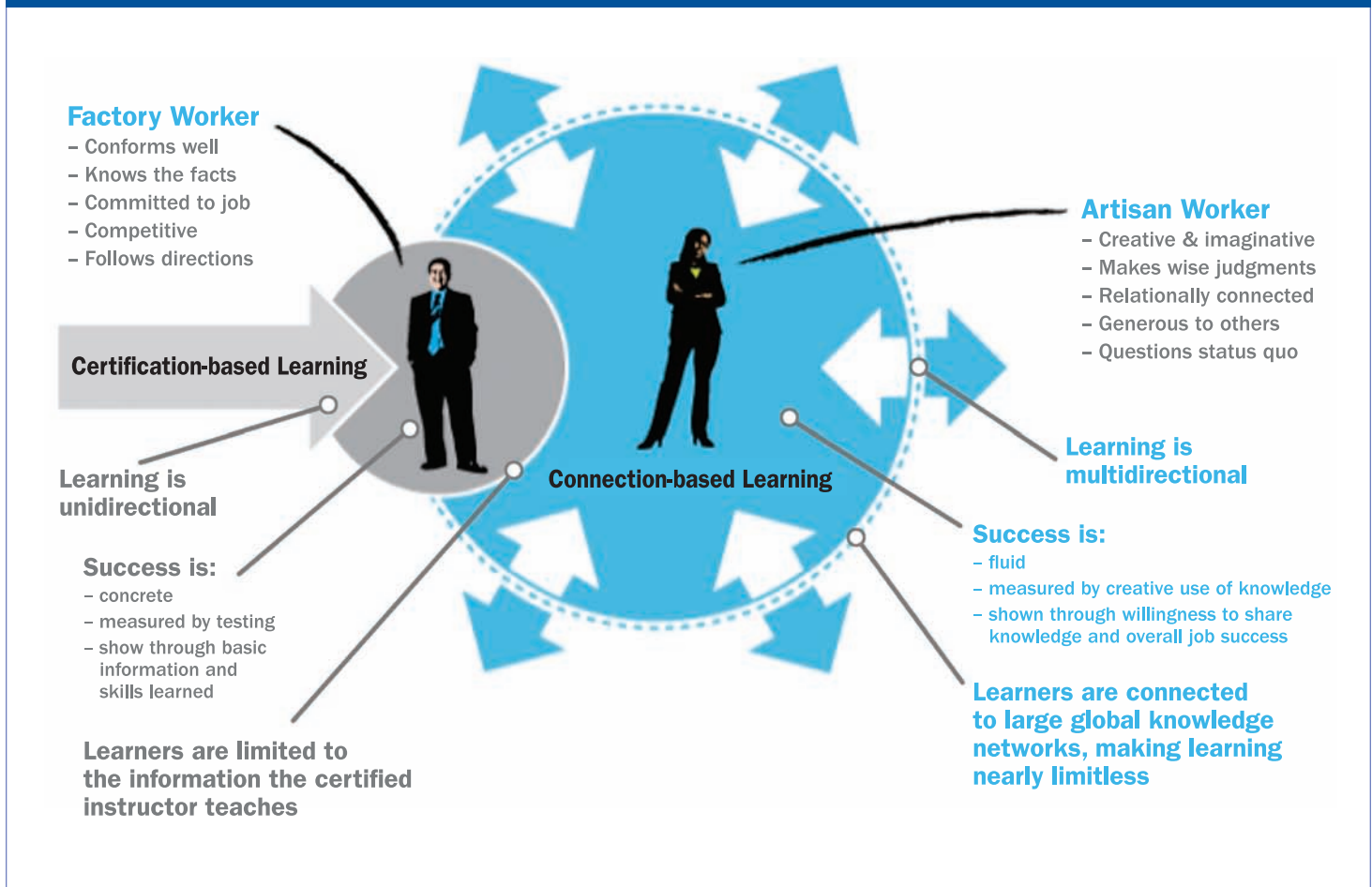
Thanks to the technology revolution, average workers have instant access to almost unlimited sources of information. Unfortunately, this access to information causes them to search and stare and search and stare and search and stare ... and never make any decisions. The shift today needs to move people from information to wisdom. Wis-

dom is the ability to apply acquired knowledge in practical ways to one's business context. Wisdom is gained the same way that craftsmen have learned their trade over the centuries: from other people and practitioners, not from a database. We need context and relational connections for greatest impact.

**Learning Impact:** *Growing Opportunities for Learning Rooted in Context*

If we really do want to produce creative people, why are we still locked in training and education patterns characterized by conforming, following directions and mastering content?

## EXHIBIT 2: THE SHIFT IN 21ST CENTURY LEARNING



### MOVEMENT 3 – FROM GENERALIZED TO PERSONALIZED

The skills and knowledge of today's information workers are often only relevant for 12 to 18 months. This means workers have to constantly keep up with new trends to stay relevant. Organizations have to help them significantly increase the speed to competency to keep up with this pace. Curriculum development for both classroom and e-learning simply will not occur quickly enough. A more effective approach is building a flexible learning network of quality advisers that moves and shifts with the learning needs of each individual. This constantly growing network of collaborators and advisers can be resourced

as needed, with the most powerful networks being those that are diverse in terms of people's function, experience and background.

#### **Learning Impact:** *Expanding Relational Learning Options to Build Flexible Learning Networks*

In summary, we need a major shift from certification-driven, content-based learning systems to connection-based systems that provide flexible, self-directed access to experts and peers where focused learning engagements can provide real-time, contextual learning. Only this kind of environment will produce the types of effective workers we need for the next 20 years.

**Randy Emelo**, president and CEO of Triple Creek ([www.3creek.com](http://www.3creek.com)), has devoted much of his life to helping others learn and develop. With more than 20 years of experience in management, training and leadership development, Emelo has worked with hundreds of clients, showing them how to close skill gaps and bring about speed to competency with interactive, relational and measurable enterprise mentoring software.

### ‘The Future is Already Here — It’s Just Not Evenly Distributed’

By Teresa Roche, vice president and chief learning officer, Agilent Technologies

While I still believe there is a need for some directed organizational learning that sets context and content that matters to the work community, I wholeheartedly agree with Randy Emelo’s statement that organizations need to create learning environments that are driven by self-directed, collaborative learning experiences.

Measurement is the foundation of discovery, and for more than 70 years, Agilent Technologies has been the world’s premier measurement company. Agilent’s products and services help scientists and engineers address their most difficult challenges with precision, confidence and breakthroughs that make a difference in the world. The DNA of our company is innovation, and some of the key capabilities required are the ability to challenge the status quo, the ability to anticipate through external focus and the ability to connect to customers and each other. Emelo’s description of workers required for the 21st century has long been upon us at Agilent, and yet I believe we are just beginning to understand the innovative, new ways we need to create and sustain our dynamic, knowledge-intensive environment.

Agilent’s global teams collaborate at all levels to continually understand evolving customer needs, market conditions and technology goals. This collective innovation relies on synergy in multiple forms, where two or more individuals or technology components work together to produce an outcome not obtainable independently. Our success depends on our talented people. We simply need to provide multiple ways for them to integrate and make meaning of information quickly and

then collaborate effectively, creating a culture of speed to opportunity for our customers with uncompromising integrity.

The future we need to see and act on is complex and full of uncertainty. To remain competitive in these conditions, we must ensure effective knowledge transfer at a pace almost unparalleled. It involves not just our own employees sharing information; it also includes networking externally with our customers, channel partners and thought leaders in our industry. It is all about leveraging our intellectual capacity across different roles, domain expertise, experience and backgrounds around the world.

Social media can create and unleash powerful communities by connecting people inside and outside an organization, and Agilent is experimenting with various tools and technologies that enable our employees to communicate and collaborate more effectively. We are trying to understand how our employees can learn with the technology that they use in their daily living. We are asking ourselves what is the appropriate role of these tools in our work environment and how can we unleash their use in a responsible manner? My team and I believe it is through rapid experimentation where we invite our employees to try something with us and then we all learn and adapt. Technology has allowed us to form self-organizing communities for some of our development programs, and we have been asking ourselves what role we best play in a world of peer-to-peer learning. A quote that often guides us is William Gibson’s: “The future is already here — it’s just not evenly distributed.”

**Teresa Roche** is vice president and chief learning officer at Agilent Technologies. In this role, she is the lead architect and portfolio manager for the company’s leadership development solutions.

### Moving Toward Adaptive Learning

By Erik M. Gregory, Ph.D., director of Organizational and Leadership Psychology, Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology (MSPP), Whole Leadership Collaborative, LLC

In Randy Emelo’s, “The Future of Learning Systems,” Emelo calls for a change in our tried-and-true methods of teaching and learning based on an agrarian society to a teaching and learning model that will address the complexities facing us in the 21st century.

Emelo essentially advocates what I see as the need to change from a technical solutions-based model of leadership and change — on which we base many of our management programs in the United States — to looking at adaptive models of change to address the ever-increasing complexity of today’s economic, political, environmental and social problems.

I agree with him. The 20th century was beset by Person A leaders that reflected a patriarchal hierarchy. That model failed on many levels in the 20th century and will do very little to address what is really needed for the 21st century: adaptive changes. Such a model of learning creates leadership that instead addresses today’s rapidity of change to survive under constantly changing conditions.

A few years ago, I took a course from Ron Heifetz on adaptive leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Our first assignment within our small working groups was to identify a leadership failure we faced. Our fellow group members served as a personal board of directors pointing out possible blind spots in the leadership challenges that we undertook. We examined our own reactivity to situations and how we may have misdiagnosed the actual challenges we needed to address to effect change. Perhaps we had moved too quickly; or we had not run enough experiments and gave up too quickly. All of us bore scars from backfired leadership

Our success depends on our talented people.



## perspectives – counterpoints

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efforts. Heifetz's theory and teaching approach develops the Person B of Emelo's model who is creative, courageous and has the skills to question the status quo to create constructive change. It incorporates Emelo's objective of movement from conformity to creativity; from technical solutions to adaptive ones; and general solutions to tailored approaches. Such work ultimately helps to mobilize resources for change — my working definition of a leader.

Keep in mind that individuals across the organizational spectrum can be leaders. Leaders can be found within families, communities, schools, states and governments. We must move away from the model of the CEO as commander in chief and the one and only leader. Throughout history, we have seen how leaders have emerged to impact social change by working or influencing stakeholder groups to create change. And leaders need followers. Without followers, leaders do not exist.

If we return to evolutionary biology, which I personally believe in, it is clear that the organism that does not adapt to its environment goes extinct. Emelo is moving us from extinction to adaptation so that we not only survive, but also thrive.

**Dr. Erik M. Gregory** specializes in positive psychology, a field that examines healthy human functioning such as courage, hope, optimism and happiness. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Master degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Higher Education Administration and Human Development and Psychology. He currently is the director of the Organizational and Leadership Psychology program at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, which provides graduate degrees in Higher Education, Organizational Psychology and a new doctoral program in Leadership Psychology.

### Learning is the Most Daunting Business Challenge

*By Stacey Harris, vice president of research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group*

Randy Emelo provided a realistic view of the people challenges that organizations will face in the next 20 years. Ensuring that the future workforce will retain the requisite institutional knowledge, while being capable of applying both solid wisdom and innovative thinking, is a daunting task for business and HR leaders alike. Success lies in the ability to find the right approaches and systems to people development and the right people to drive those processes.

Many organizations struggle to plan their workforces effectively. Recent industry research shows that, on average, only 30 percent of organizations feel they effectively allocate and develop their workforces for future business goals. The workforce planning process is full of unknowns, especially in such an unforgiving economic climate. Organizations that have identified high-performing qualities for their current workforce must keep one eye on the future when it comes to requiring new and different qualities down the road.

These challenges beg the question of what is the optimal approach to training and developing individuals who will succeed today and lead tomorrow. Current approaches to training must evolve from traditional approaches to more innovative models to produce creative leaders.

Strict construction and adherence to traditional certification-based training programs led by instructors who conduct primary training in a face-to-face format is fast becoming a distant memory. With the changing dynamics of the current workforce — flexible schedules, dispersed work teams, and mobile and telecommuting work environments — the feasibility of training all employees with a standard approach is unsustainable.

Learning and retaining knowledge with this rigid form of training is also a major concern. With the advent of four generations in our workforce, it has become clear that the way people want to learn and be promoted has changed forever. No longer is it satisfying, or productive, for most of today's workforce to grow in their position or advance their career through traditional development paths. Brandon Hall Group research has found that structured training that leads from one level to the next is ineffective in many situations. Multigenerational learning and development initiatives focus on learner-centric models where content design and delivery is tailored to the individual style of the learner.

Social media has changed the lives of today's workforce by creating new standards in communication, relationship building and learning. The world of learning is changing, and the ability to embrace social learning as a delivery method is a necessity. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and other social media sites have placed a premium on building relationships. Social media provides a platform for people to learn in a highly collaborative environment where information is both shared and acted upon for deeper levels of

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Ensuring that the future workforce will retain the requisite institutional knowledge, while being capable of applying both solid wisdom and innovative thinking, is a daunting task for business and HR leaders alike.

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learning. This unique knowledge sharing has led to a groundswell of creativity.

**Stacey Harris** is the vice president of research and advisory services at Brandon Hall Group. Harris oversees Brandon Hall Group's research strategy and agenda, solution provider relations, and advisory services. Prior to joining Brandon Hall Group, Harris was with Bersin & Associates. In her most recent role as director of HR and talent management research, she launched the company's HR practice and led key research initiatives in strategic HR, talent strategy, organization and governance, measurement, and total rewards.

### A Millennial Perspective: The Future is Now

*By Kelvin Wong, MAOP, talent and development analyst, Brown Brothers Harriman*

Randy Emelo makes a strong business case for change with his assertion that the shift in the 21st century learning systems will occur toward relationship-based, broadly networked and nonhierarchical environments. I would agree with the statement that a focus on connection-based learning is necessary; however, his reasoning places too much emphasis on the characteristics of an individual learner rather than the requirements of the business environment. To support his arguments, Emelo differentiates workers as either having Person A or Person B qualities. In doing so, his argument becomes centered on the types of persons that will exist, but not what type of broader environment will allow for these new workers to emerge in the first place.

Emelo also states that there will be a need for more “artisans” than “factory workers” in the 21st century — but why use social constructs from the Industrial Age? He weakens

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his argument by citing historical concepts to strategize about the future. Was it not the factory worker who replaced the artisans in the first place? Moreover, globalization of business flattens the competition and makes it intergenerational over and above intergenerational. The 21st century individuals are looking for the next competitive edge to differentiate themselves from their peers and, only then, from the past. Therefore, we need to reshape our learning systems to be more relationship-based and self-directed.

Early on, individuals would distinguish themselves from their peers by being better skilled at a job, but global business environment changed how workers would set themselves apart from each other. More than a century ago, industrialization created a generation of workers who advanced by having values of hard work and loyalty. Toward the latter part of the last century, individuals sought out certifications such as high school, college and graduate degrees to distinguish themselves from their peers and compete in the labor markets. Today, these degrees and certifications are seen as required and expected, and individuals are looking for the new ways to stand out in the global labor marketplace. The new differentiator is fast becoming the person's connectivity and their ability to discover and source new knowledge fast, rather than come prepackaged with the required competencies. Consequently, we need the learning system that will develop agile, uber-connected individuals who will know how to succeed in the first-time situations.

These types of integrative learning systems will have prominence in the 21st century, not

because of the type of person that will exist, but because our global economic environment will demand it. And it is already happening. Unhappy with the educational options we now have, my peers are already opting out in greater numbers to pursue learning on their own. Steve Jobs was the role model for our generation. We are seeking collaboration with our peers; we demand to be creative and innovative often despite our education and our siloed work environment. In other words, individuals of my generation are already at the threshold of new learning, and they are driving the change. More than ever, the pressure is on for the traditional learning systems to be replaced by the on-demand, self-directed and personalized approaches to service the next economic shift from the Information Age to the Globally Connected Age. **P&S**

**Kelvin Wong** is an analyst in Organizational Effectiveness and Talent Management at Brown Brothers Harriman. His focus is HR Analytics. He holds Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Boston University and a Masters in Organizational Psychology from the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology. He is a first generation Asian-American, and has represented Non-profit organizations specializing in cultural and generational education. He is an active alumni with the Organizations and Leadership Psychology Alumni Alliance at MSPP. Originally from New York, Wong currently resides in Boston.