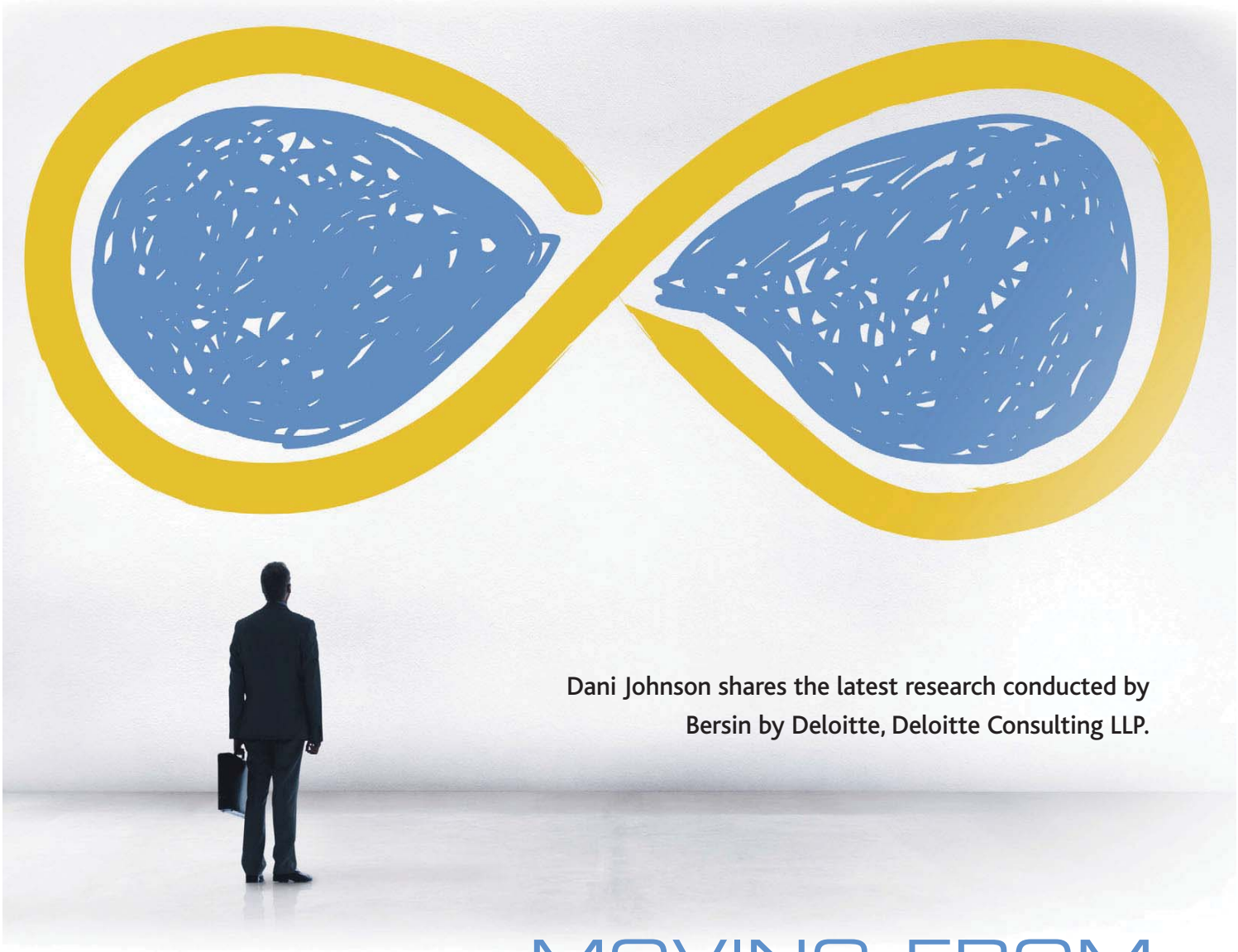


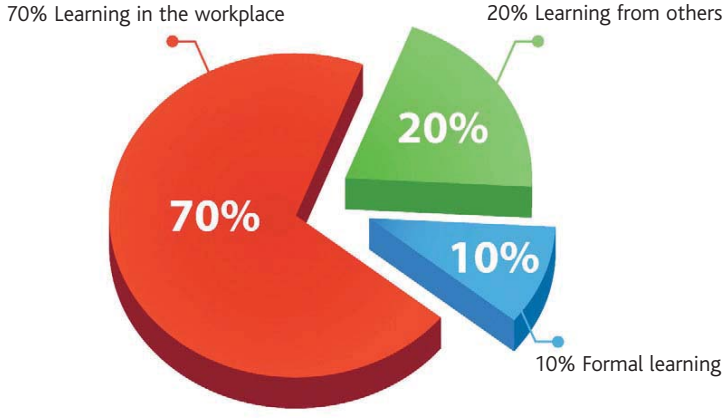
Dani Johnson shares the latest research conducted by Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Consulting LLP.

MOVING FROM 70:20:10 TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The 70-20-10 approach is a model of development in which 70% of learning happens in the workplace through practice and on-the job experiences; 20% comes through other people via coaching, feedback, and networking; and 10% is delivered through formal learning interventions (*Fig 1*).

The true origins of this model are a bit obscure. By many accounts, it was developed by Morgan McCall, Robert W. Eichinger, and Michael M. Lombardo in conjunction with the Centre for Creative Leadership during the 1980s[1] and formalised in the book *The Career Architect Development Planner* (3rd Edition), in 2000. The concept is also attributed to a 1998 Bureau of Labor Statistics report referencing research from 1993 to 1994 that suggests people learn

Figure 1: **THE 70-20-10 MODEL**



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Consulting LLP 2016

70% of their job skills informally.[2] Finally, Allen Tough has also been credited with the original idea as described in his 1979 book *The Adult's Learning Projects*.[3]

More startling than its unclear history, however, is the lack of empirical data supporting this approach. In a DeakinPrime white paper entitled *Demystifying 70:20:10*[4], authors Kelly Kajewski and Valerie Madsen conclude:

'From our review it is clear that there is a lack of empirical data supporting 70:20:10 and, while the above mentioned sources are frequently credited, there is also a lack of certainty about the origin.'

Despite this lack of evidence, the 70-20-10 learning development model has been the common sense rule of thumb utilised by L&D practitioners for the last few decades. Learning assets are often classified using this model, learning programmes often built to it, and discussions concerning the right metrics to use to track the elusive 70% of the model are common. In many ways, 70-20-10 has shaped the way we design corporate learning.

However, in our conversations with L&D organisations, we're seeing that this model may have shortcomings when it comes to aiding development. This could be for three main reasons:

- **L&D functions often use this approach prescriptively.** Many L&D departments tend to take this model too literally, using it as a guideline for the overall mix of their learning portfolio. The 70-20-10 formula is often applied regardless of learner needs, industry, or management level

- **The focus of this model is internal. Focusing on a 70-20-10 formula may lead to loss of perspective.** The goal of L&D should not be to provide training in (or to divide training programmes into) these three quantities; rather, the goal should be to increase worker knowledge and skills that will likely make the organisation more competitive. Additionally, 70-20-10 sometimes places an emphasis on what is being created rather than on how people are being developed

- **A 70-20-10 approach may isolate L&D and take responsibility off other stakeholders.** This type of model may isolate L&D, putting a large part of the creation, delivery, and success of learning initiatives on L&D without providing for collaboration with other pertinent stakeholders, such as line management, HR, talent management, and even learners themselves

Our intent is not to disparage the great work organisations have done implementing a 70-20-10 model or the successes they have seen as a result. In fact, in its purest form, this concept has helped L&D departments move from a fully formal approach to training and development, to one that acknowledges and utilises other resources to help workers improve their capabilities.

However, this model may encourage an L&D-centric perspective that may hinder the development of learners – and therefore organisations – over time. In its place, we would like to introduce a different approach that encourages a different mindset and makes it easier for L&D to focus on both business priorities and the learner experience. This approach is referred to as 'continuous learning'.

Continuous learning is defined as 'structuring resources, expectations, and learning culture in such a way as to encourage employees to learn continuously throughout their tenure with the organisation.'[5] In other words, unlike traditional training, continuous learning considers learning to be a process rather than a series of programmes (*see Fig 2, below*).

The model describes paradigms, or contexts, in which employees learn. The Continuous Learning Model addresses four contexts, referred to as the 'Four Es':

- **Education** encompasses elements we often think of in the context of learning and development. These elements generally have a defined beginning and end, and can be tracked

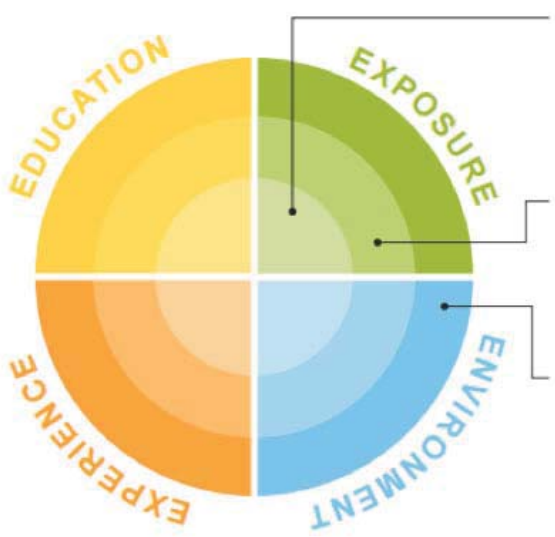
- **Experience** includes elements that generally occur while employees are in the workplace and may include things such as stretch assignments, job rotations, and special projects

- **Exposure** comprises learning elements that involve interaction and relationships. Exposure type activities encourage development by building connections with other professionals and thought leaders

- **Environment** covers tools, systems, and other infrastructure employees use on-the-job to learn or support them in their work

This emphasis on different types of learning needs and the context or contexts in which employees learn give a continuous learning model, when applied correctly, some distinct advantages over the 70-20-10 approach, such as:

Figure 2: **CONTINUOUS LEARNING MODEL**



Immediate

Performance support and other tools for point-of-need learning

Q. What do I need to support my success in the moment?

Intermediate

Current job development and competency expansion

Q. What do I need to grow my current role?

Transitional

Development of skills and relationships that will meet long-tern business goals

Q. What do I need to grow in my career?

Source: Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Consulting LLP 2014

• **Focusing externally and holistically on how people are being developed.** While 70-20-10 focuses on what L&D produces, the purpose of the continuous learning model is to view learning through the context of the Four Es described earlier, and to manage those contexts to provide consistent learning over an employee's tenure with the organisation

• **Emphasising the learning experience.** Instead of focusing on assets, the continuous learning model addresses the learning experience as a whole and provides the right kinds of learning approaches for specific learners at specific points in time in their careers. Continuous learning moves away from thinking programmatically altogether and allows for personalisation in learning experiences

• **Insisting on collaboration.** Instead of relying only on L&D to produce, deliver, and measure all learning and development, continuous learning involves all stakeholders, including L&D, line management, learners themselves, and the organisation as a whole

• **Providing expectations and priorities that are descriptive rather than prescriptive.** A well-defined continuous learning model offers L&D, the organisation, and learners a map for development. It sets expectations and priorities but does not generally prescribe some types of learning over others

Adopting a continuous learning model may change the focus of an L&D department from internal to external; from learning assets to learning experiences; from isolation to collaboration; and from prescriptive to descriptive. But how do organisations move from 70-20-10 to continuous learning?

MOVING TO A CONTINUOUS LEARNING MODEL

Moving from a 70-20-10 model to a continuous learning approach requires effort and change on the part of both L&D and the rest of the organisation. The good news is, there is incentive for stakeholders to evolve the learning model. The other good news is that this evolution does not have to happen all at once. Changes in mindset and culture take time. We suggest beginning with three relatively small actions:

1. Claiming Responsibility for Organisational Learning

L&D professionals generally understands the learning assets they are responsible for creating and distributing (items that generally fall into the education and environment quadrants) but many times are not as involved in developing or accounting for learning that happens in the experience or exposure quadrants.

What's more, business units and functions often seek and purchase their own learning solutions? This often means L&D is not even aware of all the educational activities happening across the organisation. Claiming responsibility begins with taking stock of what learning and development is happening whether L&D is currently responsible for it or not.

Clearly, not all learning management and development will fall under the stewardship of L&D. However, unless L&D understands the learning opportunities available within all four quadrants and in all areas of the company, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish continuous learning as a functional idea. L&D should see itself as the enabler for learning within the organisation as a whole.

2. Changing Vocabulary and Mindset

Second, begin speaking about learning differently. This applies both within the L&D department and in communication with the larger organisation. Replace terms such as 70-20-10, formal, and informal with vocabulary such as continuous learning, employee experience, education, experience, exposure, and environment. L&D should begin to speak of 'enabling' learning and development instead of 'delivering' it.

Changing language may go a long way to changing how an organisation thinks about the role of L&D and learning. For example, when we say formal learning, L&D professionals most likely think about classroom training, e-learning, or simulations. Under the 70-20-10 model, L&D professionals attempt to ensure no more than 10% of the learning portfolio falls within this category. However, reorganise learning approaches into the contexts introduced by the continuous learning model, and new possibilities open up.

3. Involving and Coordinating with Stakeholders outside L&D

L&D cannot be everywhere and does not have direct supervision over all learning activities. In essence, it 'takes a village' to train workers. While L&D should take responsibility for overall organisational learning, this does not mean they must execute everything by themselves. They should seek input from several functions and coordinate with other groups in order to make these changes happen. For example:

• Line management is generally primarily responsible for learning approaches that fall into the exposure and experience contexts. Line managers are also an excellent source of information concerning the types of knowledge and skills that should be developed to meet business needs

• Talent management often owns several of the programmes that fall under the experience and exposure contexts. L&D should be aware of these programmes, how they fit within continuous learning, and what kinds of supporting learning activities should be available to support these learning experiences

• Organisational executives and leaders are responsible for setting the strategy for the business. Understanding that strategy and the challenges facing the business in the next five years may guide L&D as it fills out its portfolio

• Employees should assume much more of the responsibility for their own development.This means L&D should understand learners' needs, motivations, goals, and habits, and should craft continuous learning experiences so employees receive the guidance they need and are able to find resources when they need them.

CONCLUSION

Too many L&D departments that we speak with are still struggling to get beyond formal training methods. As helpful as 70-20-10 has been to get L&D to think differently about their role, it isn't enough. Its L&D-centric focus, emphasis on assets and programmes, and tendency to isolate L&D prevent it from being truly useful as companies face today's business challenges. Learning leaders should consider a different, more continuous learning model that offers many advantages, including its external focus, its collaborative nature, and its emphasis on the learning experience.

References

1 *Source: "Learning Philosophy," Princeton University Human Resources, June 21, 2011, www.princeton.edu/hr/learning/philosophy/.*

2 *Source: Informal Training: A Review of Existing Data and Some New Evidence, U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics / Mark A. Loewenstein and James R. Spietzer, June 1994, www.bls.gov/ore/abstract/ec/ec940090.htm*

3 *Source: The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning, Allen Tough / Pfeiffer & Co., April 1979.*

4 *Source: "Demystifying 70:20:10," DeakinPrime / Kelly Kajewski and Valerie Madsen, June 2013, http://deakinprime.com/media/47821/002978_dpw_70-20-10wp_v01_fa.pdf.*

5 *Source: The Learning Architecture: Defining Development and Enabling Continuous Learning, Bersin by Deloitte / David Mallon and Dani Johnson, May 2014.*

Dani Johnson is VP, Enterprise Learning Research at Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Consulting LLP
http://home.bersin.com/
Twitter: @danij2