

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN EXECUTIVE AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH REPORT

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'Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.'

John Cotton Dana

Author

Tim Coburn

Contributors

Alan Matcham, Antoine Gerome, Luca Turconi

CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction <i>Feeling Left Behind?</i>	6
Purpose of our Research <i>Discover, Clarify, Conclude and Share</i>	7
Section One: Discover <i>Insights from Heads of Leadership Development</i>	8
Section Two: Clarify <i>How Digital Technology Improves the Impact of Leadership Development</i>	15
Section Three: Conclude and Share <i>A Seven Point Plan</i>	27
Imagine the Future	28
Next Steps	29
About Accelerance	30

FOREWORD

Innovation in digital technology is changing the world as we know it.

But how is it changing executive and leadership development? How are companies using the advantages of digital to accelerate the development of their future leaders? And for those eager to do more, what guidelines are there for doing it well?

These are the questions our research set out to answer.

What we learned confirmed our impression that only a small number of companies are leveraging the full potential digital offers. There are good reasons for this.

Like the challenges we help leaders solve, using digital technology to improve leadership development is also complex, uncertain and risky. It is hard to understand.

Combining real world insights from heads of leadership development and a distillation of 'ideas that work', this report offers practical steps for accelerating the use of digital technology in executive and leadership development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who took part in our research, responding generously during our interviews, sharing their insights and lessons learned for the greater benefit of others.

Interviews were conducted with heads of executive and leadership development at global companies in the following sectors:



Public Safety



Telecommunications



Food &
Beverages



Diversified Products



Industrial
Automation



Banking and
Financial Services



Packaging and
Containers



Medical Devices



Leisure Products



Consumer Goods



Multinational
Conglomerate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The speed of innovation in digital technology is moving faster than our human ability to adapt and use it well. Deloitte's Human Capital Trends Report for 2017 showed how our digital experience at work is even further behind the digital experience in our social lives.

Just as Uber, Airbnb and Netflix stand out as disruptors who worked out how to use digital to create greater value for customers than incumbent companies, we expect pioneers in the field of leadership development to successfully harness technology and disrupt the way leaders learn and develop.

We interviewed 12 forward-thinking heads of executive and leadership development to discover what is currently happening. We combined those insights with international good practice to provide practical guidance for companies who want to accelerate the use of digital learning technologies in leadership development.

Significantly, innovative practices are not being driven by a digital learning strategy. They are being driven by the principle that leadership development exists to enable the execution of corporate strategy. What appear like local and ad hoc uses of digital technology, are chosen because they are a pragmatic, relevant and tactical way to improve the effectiveness of different leadership programmes.

In some companies, the use of digital learning technology is held back by a historic reputation of the LMS as a dispenser of low quality, mandatory training, the availability of better learning resources on the internet and a cautious view that knowledge alone does not make learning happen.

But the advantage of integrating the LMS with talent and performance management systems has made it easier to identify leadership capability gaps and target development solutions to close them.

That said, the days of the LMS as the corporate focal point for learning could be numbered. The proliferation of curated knowledge services, with improvement algorithms that continuously hone what they offer to personal learning and performance needs, makes 'learning at the point of value creation' our next horizon. And this will **disrupt the general assumption that 'leaders need to go on a course'**.

Instead, **'learning needs to go to leaders'** and collaborative robots enabled by artificial intelligence are already making that happen. And this includes emotionally sensitive AI coaches, like Woebot, guaranteed to take the human inconsistencies out of effective coaching.

As digital automation takes on more managerial work, the work leaders do and the capabilities they need will change. We see a leadership shift from individual toolkit to collaborative mindset. **Digital innovation is enabling and challenging leaders to 'stand back, step up, see more and do more good' by using a new generation of human meta-cognitive and meta-affective capabilities.** As leadership specialists, our role is to assist in defining and then developing this new human capital.

We are already seeing the desire for a collaborative leadership mindset in leaders themselves. Given the opportunity, they prefer face-to-face learning, provided those taking part and facilitating have something valuable and relevant to share. And now social media can augment and enhance it with collaborative learning platforms like Workplace from Facebook, Slack and Microsoft Teams.

Through this research, we identified seven guidelines for leadership specialists to use as they lead and advise their

companies in using digital technologies to enhance executive and leadership development. And via this report, we want to share these guidelines with the wider leadership development community.

With learning at the point of value creation, emotionally sensitive collaborative robots and the emergence of new human meta-cognitive and meta-affective capabilities, **there can be little doubt that the conventional practice of leadership development will change.** How far and how well is down to us.

For leadership specialists, it is our turn to lead.

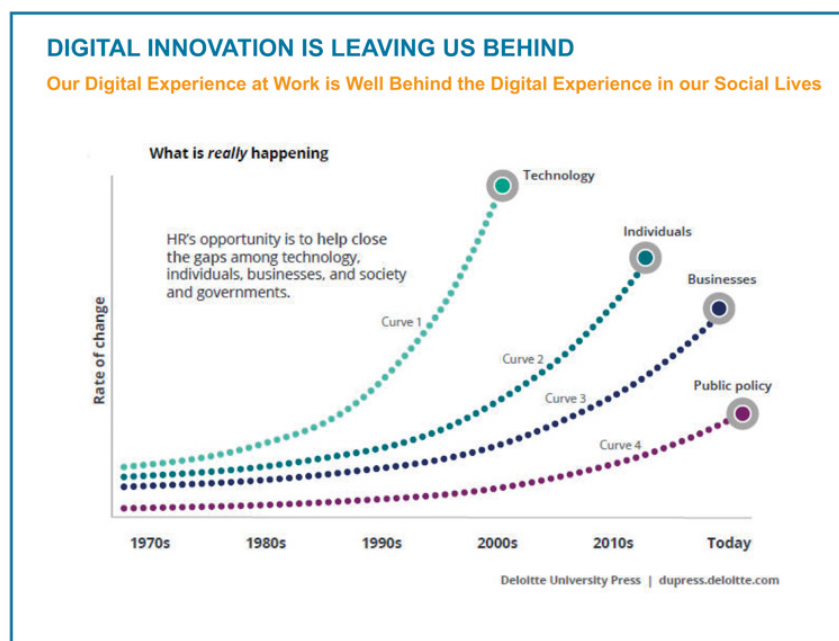


FEELING LEFT BEHIND?

You are not alone.

The speed of digital innovation is outstripping our ability to keep up. And, as many can testify, our digital experience at work lags well behind the digital experience in our social lives.

Earlier this year, Deloitte put the gap like this:



Source: 2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report, Deloitte University Press

CLOSING THE GAP

The ability of corporate organisations to close the gap depends on investment in enterprise-wide hardware and software. HR's role is to ensure employees adapt and know how to use it to create more and better value. Deloitte sees HR's role like this:

'HR has a unique role to play. It can help leaders and organisations adapt to technology, help people adapt to new models of work and careers, and help the company as a whole adapt to and encourage changes in society, regulation and public policy.'

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Digital transformation is the biggest challenge facing today's corporate leaders. To succeed, they need the imagination to lead disruption, and avoid being struck by it. And unlike change driven as the execution of a pre-conceived plan, the scale, complexity and unknown potential of digital requires the collective ingenuity of teams led by new forms of agile, adaptive and collaborative leadership.

Digital transformation is re-defining the leadership agenda everywhere.

It is also driving changes in leadership development. Like companies, the specialised function of leadership development faces its own digital disruption. It has its own digital opportunity.

DEALING WITH DISRUPTION

When consumers get better services from an alternative supplier, the incumbent faces extinction, unless they, too, adapt.

'Incumbents needn't be victims of disruption if they recognize the crucial thresholds in their life cycle, and act in time.'

McKinsey Quarterly, 2016

If you lead an executive and leadership development CoE, this is probably a challenge you are currently working on. Or, if you are, like us, one of many providers of leadership development services, this is a question we need to be working on.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR RESEARCH

The purpose of our research was to do discover, clarify and then share what we learned about the role of digital technology in leadership development.

PHASE 1: DISCOVER

We held interviews with heads of leadership and executive development at global companies to find out how they were using, and planning to use, digital technology.

PHASE 2: CLARIFY

We clarified our insights from those interviews and combined it with desk research to identify and explain how digital technology can improve the impact of leadership development.

PHASE 3: CONCLUDE AND SHARE

We drew conclusions and we are delighted to share them in this report as practical guidelines for our clients to use in developing future leaders for their companies.

Our findings are presented in this report under each of these headings.

INSIGHTS FROM HEADS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We interviewed 12 corporate heads of executive and leadership development to find out the extent to which they were using digital technologies to support the development of future leaders.

Significantly, we approached others who declined. The most prominent reason was their view that they had little or nothing to say. We felt this might be an indicator of a limited investment in digital technologies for leadership development that our research might reveal.

All the organisations we interviewed were leading, global companies with a strong history of investment in leadership development. Given the excitement about digital innovation, we wanted to know how these companies were using new technologies to develop their future leaders.

Here is a what we found:

FINDING

ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION AND PROGRESS WITH CAUTION

#1

The heads of leadership development we spoke to are actively exploring and experimenting with digital technology. At the same time, they want to learn more about what digital services are available and how other companies are using them.

They are also very clear that digital learning technologies do not replace the need for face-to-face learning. They enhance and augment it. They share a concern that, while digital services increase access to massive knowledge resources, access does not necessarily lead to learning of the kind required for leadership development.

Their perspective is reinforced by the views of leaders themselves who express a preference for learning with and from other people.

In responding to our research interviews, the heads of leadership development we spoke to placed their enthusiasm for exploring and experimenting with digital technologies within their broader responsibility for providing the quality of learning and development future leaders require.

Understandably, and not least because of the costs involved, their positive interest in the potential of digital technology is tempered by their caution about how well it is likely to work.

FINDING

NO DIGITAL STRATEGY

#2

When we asked, 'Do you have a strategy for digital technology in leadership development?', our respondents said, 'No'.

Instead, they were clear that a pragmatic, programme by programme approach was more appropriate. To illustrate their point, one respondent explained their goal was not 'to be world-class at digital', but to do what it takes to develop and support leaders in executing company strategy.

They said their role was not about providing digital tools, but more about connecting people and

knowledge as they work and learn together. And we expect the role of digital as an enabler of corporate strategy to evolve quickly.

Given the advantage digital knowledge services offer to leaders at any time of day, we expect the idea of learning as something you do on a course to fade away. The internet makes it possible to acquire insight, knowledge and understanding at any time and in any place.

This changes the view of leadership development as the provision of company-led programmes to be attended off-the-job, to leadership development as the expression of self-directed learning whenever leaders need it, wherever that might be.

This means leaders can acquire the knowledge they need precisely at the time they are immersed in real work challenges, when they are 'executing business strategy'. Our interviewees emphasised how important it is that investment in digital learning technologies should focus on this, and not purely on the features of the latest digital innovation.

FINDING

#3

THE LMS IS STILL THE DIGITAL HUB

All the companies we interviewed have a Learning Management System. From early days as a course scheduling and participation management system, the LMS remains the hub of digital support for leadership development.

Unfortunately, the early days of online learning has left a negative association with compliance training. The easiest way to deliver mandatory training (like induction, health and safety, diversity and technical expertise) was assumed to be digital. Early online learning programmes were rarely more than knowledge and information transmission. Reading knowledge – for that is what it usually entailed – was particularly passive and because of that, the suitability of online learning for leadership development has always been met with scepticism.

The legacy effect of this reputation is that, for as long as the LMS is perceived to be a catalogue of prescribed corporate training, leaders will use it when they have to, not because they want to.

Great strides have been made to improve things, not least by using the LMS as a gateway to rich, external knowledge resource centres.

FINDING

#4

INTEGRATION WITH PERFORMANCE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

All the companies we spoke to were using online systems to enable better integration between talent management, performance management and learning and development.

In developing future leaders, the advantage it offers is a single view of the leader, their aspirations, past performance, achievements, position in talent pools and succession plans etc.

From this profile, together with data from recent capability and potential assessments, leadership development specialists are better able to identify individual and group leadership gaps in relation to the capabilities required to execute the company's strategy. It ensures they use company strategy to set their leadership development priorities, and design solutions that enable the execution of strategic priorities.

Our interviews indicated heads of leadership development are making good use of this integration with solutions from Workday, SuccessFactors, Taleo and Saba, for example.

FINDING

#5

GATEWAY TO EXTERNAL KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

Many of the companies we interviewed were using subscription services to give leaders access to high value, curated knowledge and learning resources. Prominent among these were Harvard Online Library, Lynda.com, Skillsoft and Crossknowledge, with research-led expertise for leadership and talent specialists being frequently accessed from Gartner CEB.

Subscriptions to these services come at a significant cost. Their value comes from the credibility of the resource centre, and the value and relevance of the content.

However, some interviewees expressed a concern that, as good as the content might be, getting leaders to make use of it is not always easy. Despite its availability, some leaders never used it. Further, just as we do in our lives outside work, leaders prefer searching the internet freely, without being directed to pre-selected sources. This serendipitous freedom broadens the scope for self-directed learning driven by personal curiosity, a quality leaders do not want someone else to control.

The emerging resolution is to provide both: selective access to high quality business leadership knowledge and learning resource centres, with open access to search the internet freely.

Many of our interviewees were quick to acknowledge that knowledge does not mean learning, and learning does not always lead to improved performance. Their approach is to provide access to online learning because it plays a necessary, but insufficient part in the development of future leaders.

FINDING

#6

CURATED CONTENT AND DIGITAL ASSISTANTS, JUST FOR 'ME'

Services that preselect and deliver personally relevant online content are widely available. They are often supported by algorithms that track online behaviour and use that data to constantly improve the personal relevance of the content it delivers.

Despite its availability, and its value in helping leaders make better business decisions, we heard few examples of personalised curated content being used.

The possibility of tagging and tracking all the digital information leaders use in a typical day, including the content of documents they author themselves, can radically increase the availability of additional, high quality and relevant content as they address complex issues, apply their judgement and make decisions. This is how digital technology augments leadership performance - by enabling learning at the point of value creation.

We expect the digital augmentation of leadership performance to accelerate. It will include artificially intelligent cobots as collaborative team members, and even as personal coaches, like the emotionally sensitive Woebot. Services offering all of this are available, now. And they show significant signs of displacing human providers of leadership development conversations.

FINDING

CONCERN ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LEARNING

#7

A frequent concern mentioned by our interviewees was the need to ‘be clear what we mean by learning’.

In the context of this report, we see learning as the ability to adapt, improve and transform yourself in order to perform more effectively.

And we believe just about anything can be the stimulus for this kind of learning to occur. Reading a book, seeing a film, watching a sports team or playing with children all have the potential to leave us with an idea, an insight or even a change in our mind that helps to improve the way we lead.

We also believe there is greater potential for more learning to occur when the stimulus is supported by a flexibly structured learning process. This might include, for example, questions to clarify goals, translate new ideas into action, or enable a deeper level of self-awareness through feedback and critical reflection.

A number of our respondents made the point that digital technologies that just enable access to knowledge, may not lead to the deeper level of learning required for leadership development to take place. Immersive experiential learning activities, with peer observation, practice and coaching still retain an advantage in the holistic development of leaders.

Together with this, a frequently made general observation was that leaders prefer learning from people, especially from experienced leaders, rather than a digital interface.

For these reasons, we expect the role of face-to-face learning to continue, albeit augmented where possible by digital technologies.

FINDING

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEAM-BASED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

#8

In addition to an increase in individual, self-directed learning, digital technologies improve collaborative, team-based learning, too.

However, our research suggests the use of social media for collaborative learning is still in its early stage of deployment. With some exceptions.

In one example, a company shift to leadership development in work teams had already been made. And their learning was supported by the teamwork-based digital tool, Workplace, created by Facebook.

Other companies were using the group function in communication technologies like WhatsApp, Slack and Yammer, and digital sharing tools like Webex, Zoom and Sharepoint. But these applications were primarily to enable knowledge-sharing and communication than the development of leadership capability.

As with the provision of access to knowledge via the internet, making social media tools available does not in itself, lead to enhanced learning. For leadership development to occur, some additional structured process for team-based learning activities needs to be included.

FINDING

LITTLE USE OF DATA AND ANALYTICS

#9

As with other forms of evaluation, data collection related to the use of digital resources in leadership development appears to be a low priority – for now.

The heads of leadership we interviewed were very aware of the insight that could be gained by capturing the online learning patterns of successful leaders.

However, at the time of our survey, they were also aware of the challenges to be addressed first. The three most frequently mentioned were data privacy, working with IT to obtain the data, and knowing what data to track and how to use it. Together, these three challenges represent a current hurdle that heads of leadership are keen to resolve.

When they are, we expect data and analytics to be the fuel that drives radical improvement in digitally enabled leadership development.



SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

The findings of our research reveal an overall picture summarised by these nine points:

- The exciting potential of digital learning technologies is being actively explored but with cautious scrutiny of its ability to deliver the right quality of learning leaders need.
- Investment in learning technologies is not led by a digital strategy. It is driven by the specific requirements of different learning interventions and through those, it is determined by the role leadership development plays in equipping leaders to execute the company's strategy.
- The role of digital technology in leadership development is grounded in, and in some cases held back by, the technology and reputation of the company's learning management system.
- In almost all cases, the company LMS is integrated with online systems for performance and talent management, making it easier to identify leadership capability gaps in relation to the capabilities required to execute the company's strategy.
- To give leaders access to business relevant knowledge and freedom to search more widely, companies use a combination of subscription to credible, external learning resource centres and open access to the internet.
- While the individual and business benefit of enabling learning at the point of value creation is clear, heads of leadership development are cautious about the extent to which digital services can enable the deeper levels of learning holistic personal development requires.
- For this reason, and because leaders say they are more engaged by high quality face-to-face learning, digital solutions are more likely to be used to augment and enhance leadership development, and not to replace it.
- As interest in team-based leadership development takes off, we expect a further increase in the use of online collaboration tools as enablers of team learning, as well as team performance.
- The promise of data and analytics in providing intelligence about how successful leaders use online resources, is well understood. Progress in achieving this benefit is currently inhibited by factors associated with data privacy, IT collaboration and knowing what data to collect and why. When these are resolved, companies will use data and analytics as fuel for driving further innovation in digitally enabled leadership development.



A PICTURE REVEALED

The picture revealed by our research suggests progress in using the full potential of digital technologies is slow, despite there being some clear examples of innovative practice.

As our minds were opened during the research phase, we began to see the challenge more clearly.

With so much digital innovation so fast, and with the internal constraints of legacy systems and conventional leadership development practices, knowing how to make progress is not easy.

For this reason, we entered the phase of our desk research with a view to clarifying a set of practical guidelines that could help all of us in this profession, do a better job with digital.



HOW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We took the insights from heads of leadership development as signposts for our desk research.

Building on their real examples, we wanted to clarify what digital technology does and understand why and how it improves the impact of leadership development. This is what we found.

WHAT WE FOUND AND WHY IT WORKS

Digital technology improves the impact of leadership development in a number of ways.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BY...	
1	ENABLING LEARNING AT THE POINT OF VALUE CREATION
2	IMPROVING THE EXECUTION OF CORPORATE STRATEGY
3	RELEASING HUMAN CAPACITY SO LEADERS CAN DO MORE FOR THE WORLD
4	OPTIMISING THE IMPACT OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES
5	MAKING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MORE PERSONAL, RICH AND RELEVANT
6	DISCOVERING LEARNING PATTERNS THAT PREDICT EVEN GREATER SUCCESS
7	REMINDING US, THAT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES CANNOT DO THE PRACTICE LEADERS NEED TO DO FOR THEMSELVES

Accelerance, 2017

These benefits are already changing the practice of executive and leadership development.

GUIDELINES FOR ACCELERATING IMPROVEMENT

For the leaders of corporate Centres of Expertise responsible for improving the quality of their internal leadership pipeline, and for the business schools, consultancies and leadership development practitioners who support them, we believe these benefits are also the practical guidelines we need for accelerating the way we use digital technology to improve the impact of leadership development.

This report takes each one and elaborates on what it means and why it matters.

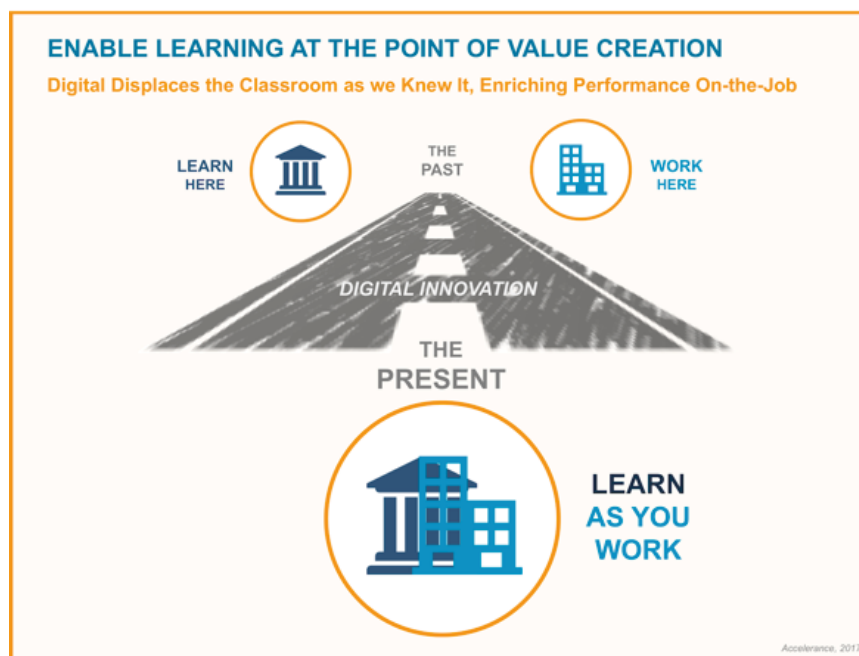
1.

ENABLE LEARNING AT THE POINT OF VALUE CREATION

Thirty years ago, before the internet, if you wanted to learn something new you would go on a course, buy a book, read a magazine or ask for some precious time with an experienced colleague.

Today, when we need to know more, we can find hundreds of pre-qualified answers within seconds, refine our question, ask it again, adapt what we learn, test a new idea with colleagues and build it into our work with great speed.

The beauty of the internet is the way it enables 'learning at the point of value creation', as and when, and wherever that might be. The classroom as we knew it, has become redundant.



In leadership development, we already know that learning 'on-the-job', doing real, challenging and developmental assignments, is rated as far more effective than anything else. Especially when supported with feedback and coaching.

So, in developing leadership capability, the advantage of 'learning at the point of value creation' lies in the way it enables learning at the point where leadership development is also most effective.

Typically, leaders access online knowledge using openly available search services such as Google, Yahoo and Baidu. For more business relevance, companies pay by subscription for higher value and better curated reading material and online learning programmes from providers like Harvard Online, Virtual Ashridge, Lynda.com, Coursera, Declara, CrossKnowledge and Udemy.

Instant access to relevant insights explains how valuable these services are. The advantage is even greater when knowledge and learning resources are more tightly curated to a) align with capabilities companies want their leaders to develop and b) respond to the precise and self-motivated needs of individual leaders in relation to the problems they want to solve and the goals they want to achieve.

Business schools and leadership development consultancies are already offering services that align knowledge and learning assets with corporate leadership competencies. And search-driven knowledge and learning providers enrich their services with algorithms that work out how to offer more relevant content based on the leader's areas of interest.

As good as this is, providing knowledge does not necessarily improve a leader's ability to learn. This essential, and more demanding leadership development challenge is harder to achieve. As digital learning providers use self-improvement algorithms to increase their ability, is it possible for digital learning technologies to improve the learning capacity of its human users?

We already know from other research that the ability to learn is the strongest indicator of the potential to succeed. Giving leaders access to knowledge may be good, but not nearly as good as improving their capacity to learn. To address this need, Learning Emergence offers a digital platform that integrates the assessment and improvement of learning power within self-directed learning journeys that also include seamless access to curated content available from Declara.

In this solution, leaders can get the knowledge they need, have their assumptions challenged and improve their learning ability, at the same time.

Before leaving this topic, there is an important cautionary note. Despite the advantage of learning at the point of value creation, the provision of knowledge and the improvement of learning do not substitute the need for practice. Leadership is about taking action to make a difference and create more value. Knowledge and ideas help, but the role of leadership development is to improve capability and enable better performance outcomes.

Digital technologies are no substitute for the practice leaders need to do for themselves.

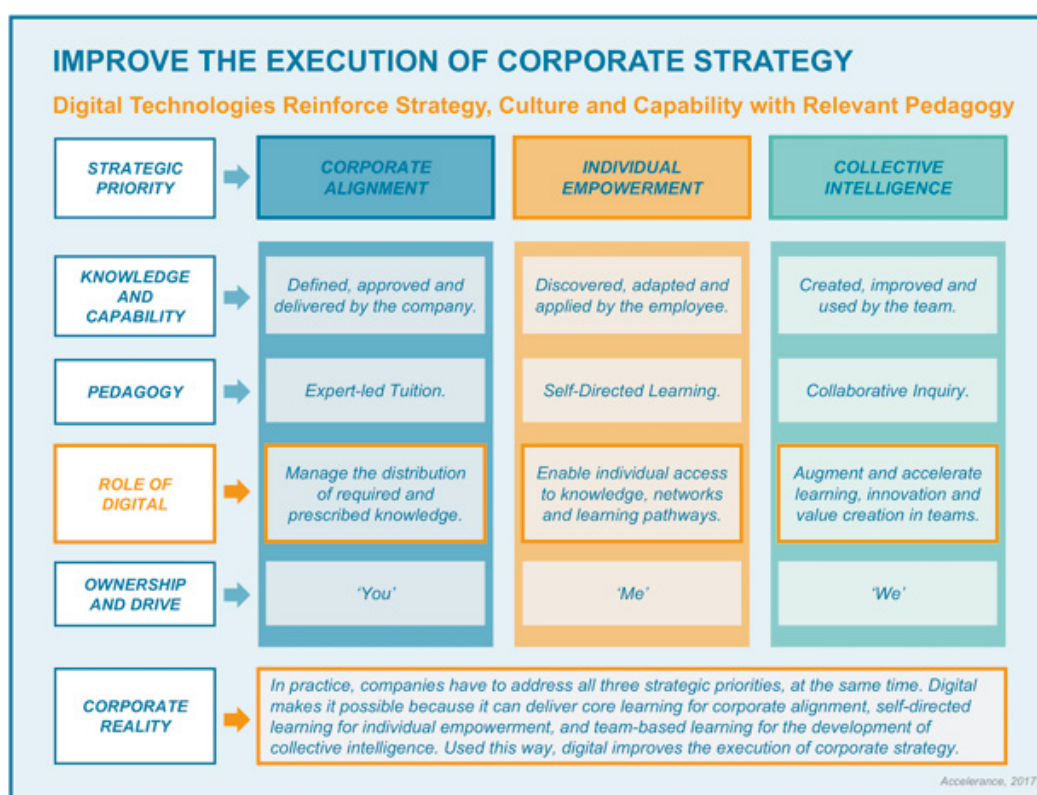
2.

IMPROVE THE EXECUTION OF CORPORATE STRATEGY

One of the biggest concerns about online learning in leadership development relates to the legacy of its widespread use in the transmission of knowledge, especially in the dissemination of learning for mandatory and compliance requirements.

Leadership development needs more than that and thankfully, digital technologies can be configured to do more than transmission.

In fact, we believe the L&D function has a distinctive role to play in demonstrating how digital technology can be used to improve the execution of corporate strategy by reinforcing the culture and developing capabilities using relevant forms of pedagogical style. This illustration shows how:



As the internet evolved, there has been a parallel evolution in learning methods, or pedagogy, for leadership development. While early use of Learning Management Systems focused on the distribution or transmission of knowledge, more advanced LMS applications, together with better online resource centres, have facilitated a shift from knowledge transmission to self-directed learning.

This corresponds with an increase in the provision of learning pathways for employees to pursue independently, as an agreed part of their personal development plan. The shift has helped companies embed corporate learning policies that advocate the employee's responsibility for their own development. And, as the opportunity to learn is well-established as a driver of engagement-led productivity, we believe digital support for self-directed learning will continue.

Even more recently, with the rise of social media and collaborative work applications such as Workplace from Facebook, Slack, Jammer and Trello, digital technologies are increasingly used to enable team-based learning, collaborative inquiry and collective intelligence.

With research indicating that teams with high collective intelligence outperform teams with higher average individual IQs, and with the rise of inclusive and collaborative leadership, we believe investment in collaborative learning technologies for leadership development will continue to rise.

As the illustration shows, in leadership development, digital technology can improve the execution of corporate strategy using relevant and different pedagogical styles.

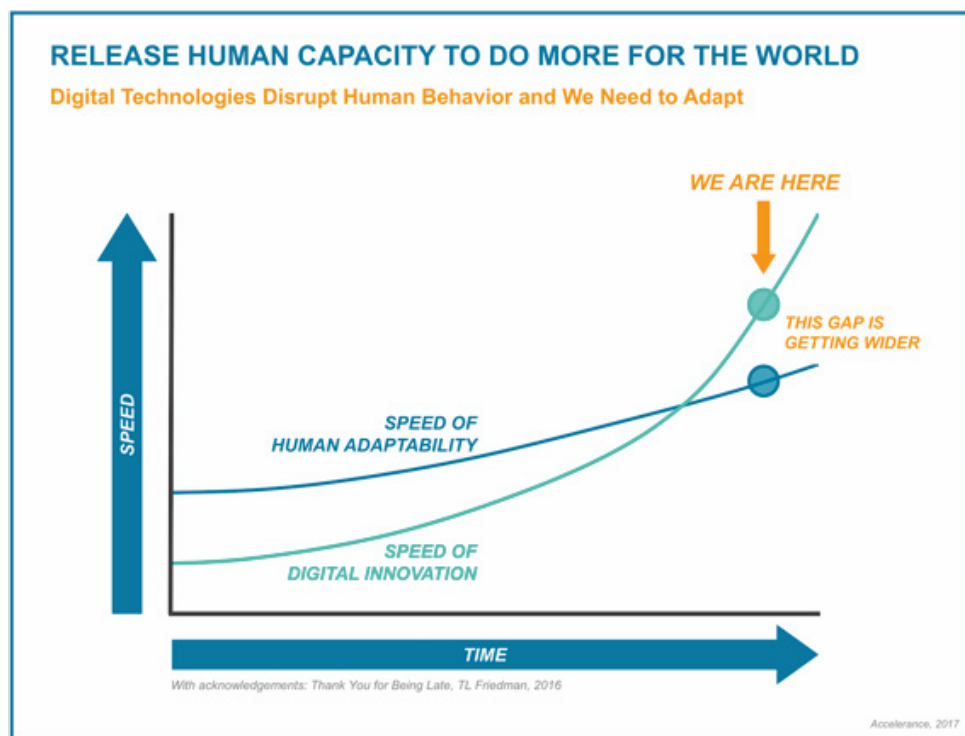
3.

RELEASE HUMAN CAPACITY TO DO MORE FOR THE WORLD

The speed of digital innovation continues to outstrip our human ability to keep up. At least, that's how it feels!

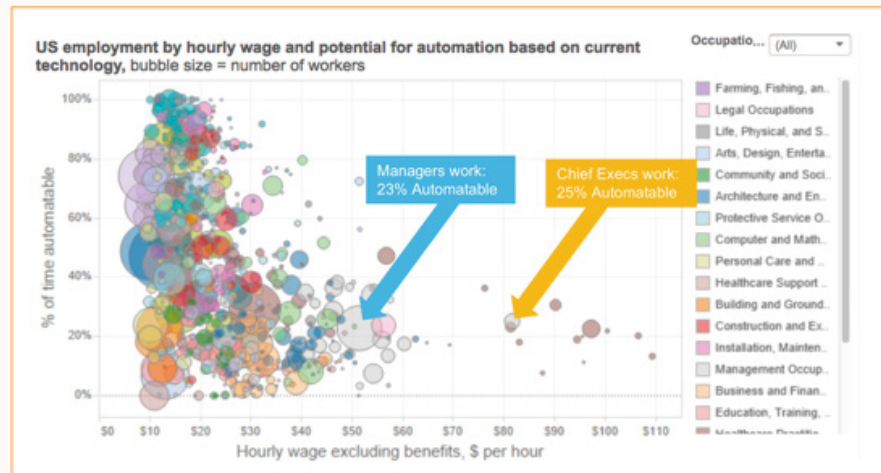
We usually think of disruption as a digitally-enabled force that radically re-positions companies in their competitive markets. Yet, we can see digital technology as a force that disrupts human behaviour, too.

Look at the widening gap between the speed of digital innovation and rate of human adaptation to it. It is impossible to imagine how leaders will give up the automated work they used to do, without changing how they use their minds. Not only do leaders need to adapt more quickly, they need to do something else.



Digital automation, including robots, cobots and artificial intelligence, is not just taking on routine, operational work, it will take on the complex problem-solving work executives and leaders do.

McKinsey's research (below) suggests digital technologies could handle as much as 25% of a leader's work. That gives leaders a lot of spare capacity!

IMPACT OF DIGITAL AUTOMATION ON THE WORK PEOPLE DO**Up to 45% of all Work Activity could be Automated; up to 25% for Leaders**

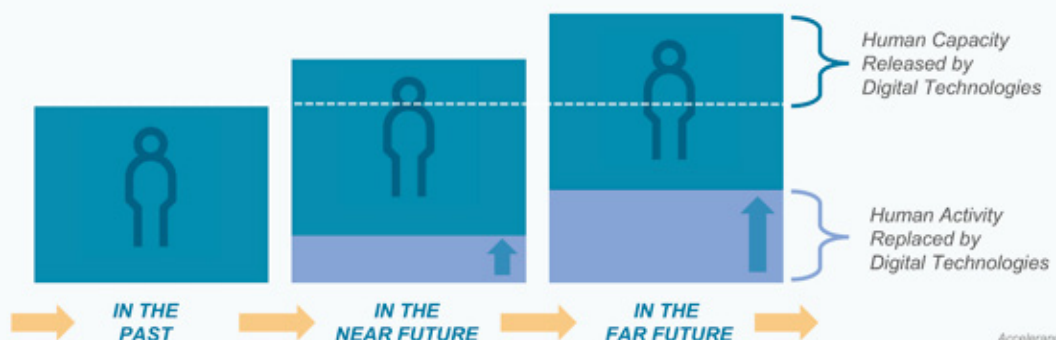
Analysis of 750+ occupations (USA) estimates up to 45% of all work activity could be automated now, with currently demonstrated technology. Source: Four Fundamentals of Workplace Automation, McKinsey Quarterly, November, 2015

Accelerance, 2017

As leaders get used to working with cobots in their teams, in addition to reducing the number of leaders required, organisations will re-purpose displaced leadership capacity to deal with difficult questions facing companies in a digitally-enabled, human world.

Digital technologies have increased our awareness of the social, economic, political and environmental dilemmas we need to address.

As social conscience continues to extend corporate purpose to address the needs of society at large, leaders need better ideas to address the complexity and scale of that challenge. The spare leadership capacity released by digital offers the bandwidth to do it.

MAKE ROOM FOR NEW HUMAN POTENTIAL**Digital Technologies Release Human Capacity**

Accelerance, 2017

We have witnessed the migration to higher order thinking, planning and decision-making in earlier industrial and service revolutions. Through times of change, the need for corporate adaptation has called on leaders to work 'on the system, not in the system'.

For senior leaders, working 'on the system' defines the unique character of their managerial work. With this focus, they help their companies, divisions and teams adapt and renew themselves, just as they need to do now, in the face of digital disruption.

Increasingly, the definitions of corporate leadership offered by researchers, academics and consultants include this idea. While alternatives abound, new leadership models put greater emphasis on the need for a detached and elevated leadership perspective, and an inclusive leadership style.

Examples include vertical, adaptive, agile and collaborative leadership.

By taking on time-consuming, traditional leadership work, digital technologies create the space and improve the quality of business information so that leaders can really 'stand back, step up, see more and do more good'.



As it always has, good leadership requires a combination of thought, feeling and action. And, while many leadership skills embody these three features, the challenges leaders face cannot be addressed by the application of those skills alone. Today's challenges call on us all to question and improve the assumptions that underpin how well we think and what we care about, to provide good human leadership in a growing digital world.

To help leaders lead in this way, the role of leadership development is to equip them with better meta-cognitive capabilities (like critical thinking, collective intelligence, learning ability and mindfulness), and better meta-affective capabilities (like empathy, inclusion, collaboration and ethics) for the problems they need to solve.

A change of mindset like this does not happen quickly. Old leadership habits die hard and it is rarely enough to change them by just including new skills in a leadership course. In this respect, we think leadership development could be using digital technology more, in partnership with their company's strategy office and internal communications team, to mount longer-term media campaigns to raise awareness, provoke interest and encourage leaders to lead better by thinking about and caring for the world in new and different ways.

4.

OPTIMISE THE IMPACT OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Most companies have already made significant investments in learning management systems. New digital solutions have to fit with the existing technology and be approved by corporate IT. As painful as this can be, digital integration is a good thing.

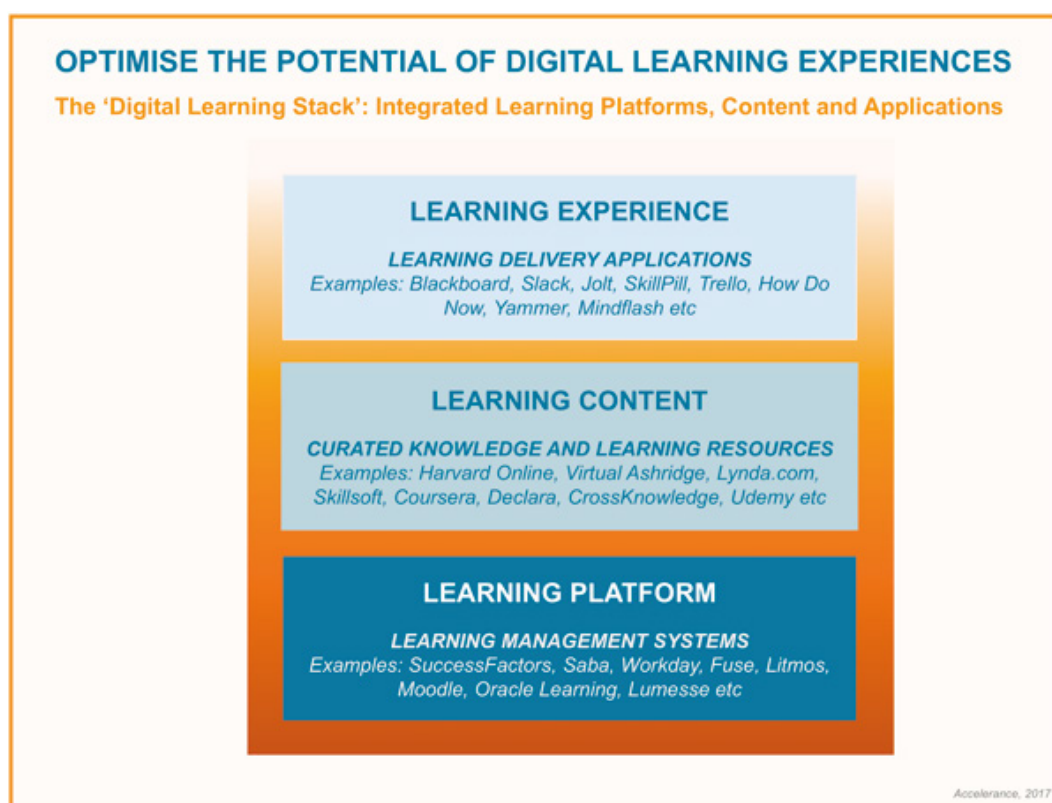
The benefits come from integrated alignment with company systems for learning and development, performance management and talent management. Leaders can be more easily assigned, informed about and tracked in relation to development programmes the company wants them to complete and the succession needs of their business or function.

As leaders make a career with their company, integration allows their online profile to be continuously updated with regard to their learning journey and as a candidate for future leadership positions.

Adding more digital learning services makes the relevance of maintaining a leader's online profile even more important. Imagine being able to view the learning behaviour pattern of your company's most successful leaders.

The aggregate learning pattern of successful leaders would give leadership development specialists an insight into a more predictably effective learning journey other leaders could follow.

While this advantage is more about data capture and analytics, it is also the main justification for integrated alignment between three levels of what we call the digital learning stack: the learning platform (typically, the learning management system), learning content (provided by internal and external curated knowledge and learning resources), and learning experiences (supported by learning delivery applications).



The digital learning stack is a helpful framework for understanding how digital learning technologies fit with one another.

For leadership development specialists, it also shows how the benefit of investment in one technology can be enriched by investment made in another. For example, the benefit to leaders of a new subscription to an online leadership resource centre would only make sense if leaders could post links to it, and access it from, the collaborative learning application they use; and the benefit to the leadership and talent CoEs would depend on the company LMS being automatically updated when learning programmes hosted by external resource centres are completed.

The corporate benefit of digital learning solutions is not just in getting leaders to use them. The real corporate benefit comes from the data they generate. When companies capture enough data to identify learning patterns that work, they will be able to use these patterns to improve the design of leadership development solutions and so increase their ability to develop more leaders of the kind the company needs.

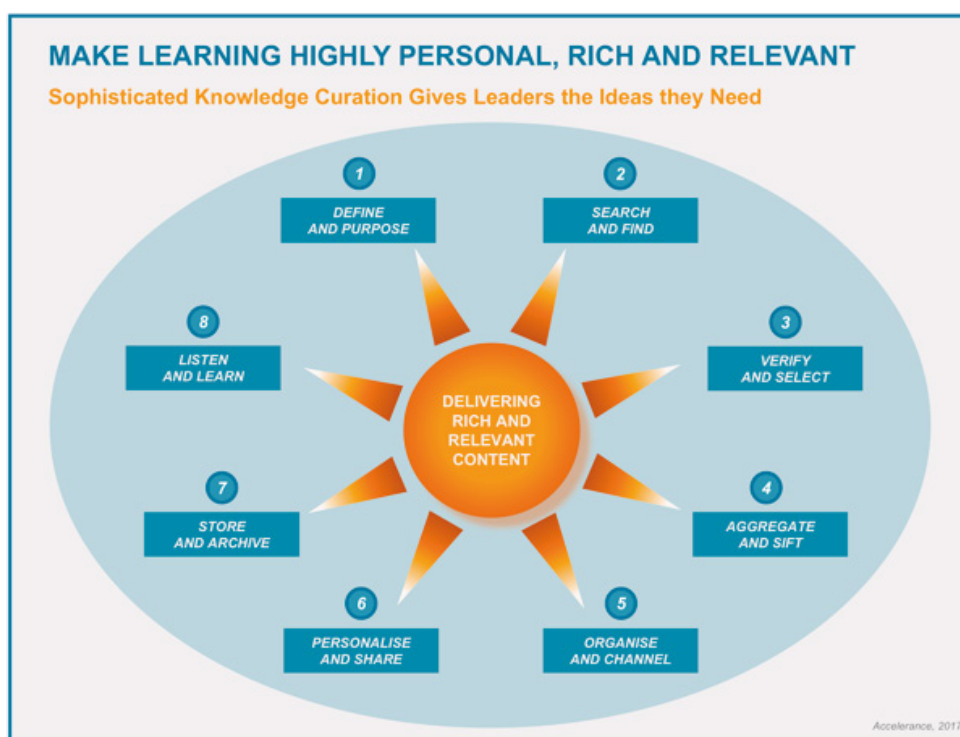
5.

MAKE LEARNING PERSONAL, RICH AND RELEVANT

When the LMS first became fashionable, it was used to deliver online learning mainly as a way of distributing corporate knowledge, and ensuring it was read. Even when the intention was otherwise, it felt like compliance training.

Online learning has become so much more sophisticated. No longer just about reading, the best examples use self-directed learning pathways to enable autonomy, gamification to make it engaging and social learning tools to help teams create new and implementable ideas.

Perhaps the best role for digital technology in leadership development is in the real-time augmentation of leadership performance.



To realise that goal, companies need to give leaders access to content that is richer and more precisely relevant to nature of their jobs. Digital technology makes this possible through sophisticated content curation.

In this discipline, algorithms are programmed to search and find high quality content, to verify it and tag it to content categories, to sift and prioritise its relevance, organising and lining it up for the right target audience. According to the preferences of users, content curation engines personalise, make available and proactively share what they find. By tagging and tracking its usage, the engine learns from its users and improves the service it provides.

In leadership development, there is an emerging opportunity for leadership specialists to specify the parameters that govern content curation for their target audience. In line with the need for leadership development to assist the execution of corporate strategy, content categories could be assigned different levels of priority. Some items might be 'pushed' to leaders as strategically critical reading; others might be tagged as strategically relevant and held back until leaders want to allocate time for them; and others would be discoverable in response to self-directed searching.

In addition to content curation parameters being set in this way, the personal value of learning resource centres is enriched by the search engine's self-improvement algorithm that constantly updates its awareness of the leader's online learning preferences.

In the same way that we receive unexpected suggestions from online retailers, artificial intelligence learns how to tailor online learning to meet the precise interests of the leaders we want to succeed.

The possibilities for personalised learning do not end here.

It's now possible for anyone to create their own artificially intelligent personal assistant programmed to do things you want it to do. This means leadership development specialists could make 'design a cobot and use it to assist your learning in this programme' a very realistic, relevant and productive learning activity in your next leadership programme.

As indicated earlier in this report, while the value of content curation for leaders is clear, the value of their digital learning patterns, when correlated with their leadership progress, is even greater for leadership development practitioners in their task of creating the next generation of digitally augmented leadership development solutions.

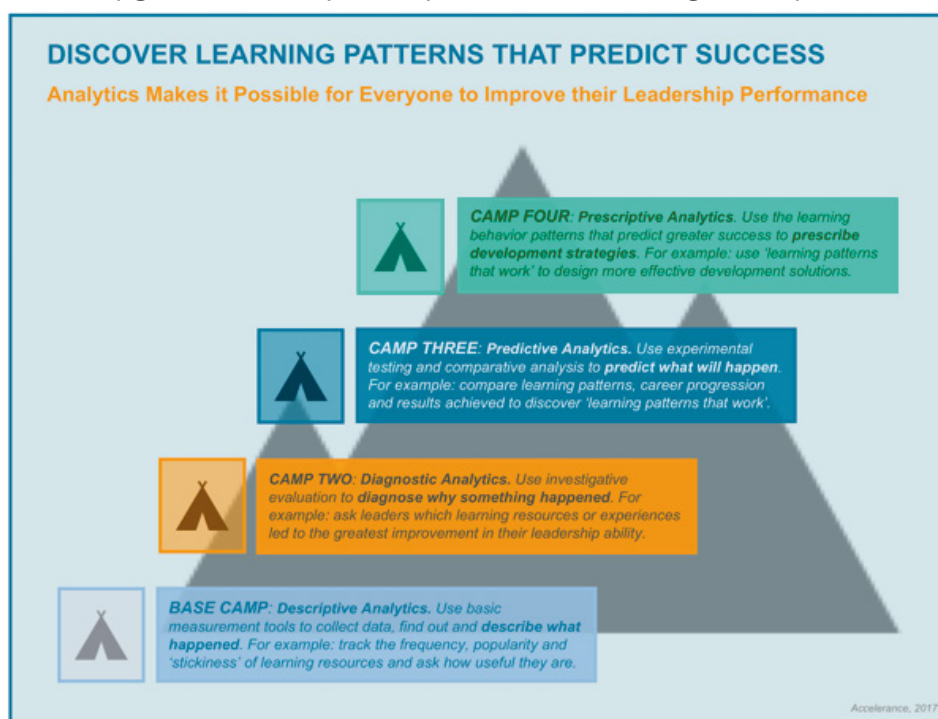
6.

DISCOVER LEARNING PATTERNS THAT PREDICT EVEN GREATER SUCCESS

In our research interviews, we heard little mention of data and analytics in relation to leadership development. However, from the findings of our desk research, and as we so often hear from other digital companies, the real value lies in the data left by the consumer's behaviour.

In short, we believe digital technology makes it possible to model excellence in the digitally trackable features of a leader's journey to success. When this data is captured from a large enough set of leaders, the most pertinent features in their aggregate learning pattern can be used as a guide for improving the quality of leadership development solutions for others with much greater predictability, thereby increasing the potential for companies to develop greater strength in their leadership pipeline.

It sounds like the holy grail of leadership development! Or at least, a significant part of it.



Evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development rarely amounts to more than gathering participant feedback. As useful as it is, in the ladder of analytics, it gets you to base camp, but no higher.

The illustration shows four incremental steps in the use of data and analytics in digitally-enabled leadership development.

The four steps are self-explanatory and the overall message is very clear: the use of data and analytics in digitally-enabled leadership development can help companies improve the effectiveness of the leadership development solutions they design.

And, when the same analysis is applied to self-directed learning activities, it has the potential to reveal new information about the effectiveness of self-directed leadership development that would otherwise be unknown.

It leads to the conclusion, in any digital component of your leadership development solution, you need a plan for capturing and using the data it creates.

7.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES CANNOT DO WHAT LEADERS NEED TO DO FOR THEMSELVES

Digital offers many advantages but it is only one side of the human-digital relationship. While we have focused on the role digital can play, digital alone is far from the complete leadership development solution.

In every leadership situation, as good as the AI might be, leaders have to make a human judgement about the right or best thing to do. And to improve their ability to do that, leaders need to be exposed to real experiences in which they can practice and improve.

In this respect, the role of leadership development is to ensure leaders learn through on-the-job, real experience for which they may need new human skills. And the best place to learn about these will continue to be in face-to-face behavioural learning activities.

For this reason, leadership development specialists will still need to design and deliver practical, skills development learning experiences for both individuals and groups, and especially for working teams.

SEVEN WAYS FOR IMPROVING THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL

Our further research identified seven areas for companies to reflect on where they currently are, and to plan how they might use digital technology to improve the effectiveness of their leadership development activities.

In summary, the seven areas show how the role of digital technology in leadership development can:

- 1 Enable learning at the point of value creation
- 2 Improve the execution of corporate strategy
- 3 Release human capacity so leaders can do more for the world
- 4 Optimise the impact of learning experiences
- 5 Make leadership development more personal, rich and relevant
- 6 Discover learning patterns that predict even greater success
- 7 And remember, digital technologies cannot do the practice leaders need to do for themselves

The final section of this report focuses on using these points as guidelines for improvement.

A SEVEN POINT PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT

RETURNING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

We set out to answer the question, 'What is the role of digital technology in executive and leadership development?'

From our research interviews, and our own further research, we identified seven ways that digital technology improves the quality and effectiveness of the learning leaders want, and companies need.

The role of digital technology in leadership development is to...



ENABLE LEARNING AT THE POINT OF VALUE CREATION



IMPROVE THE EXECUTION OF CORPORATE STRATEGY



RELEASE HUMAN CAPACITY SO LEADERS CAN DO MORE FOR THE WORLD



OPTIMISE THE IMPACT OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES



MAKE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MORE PERSONAL, RICH AND RELEVANT



DISCOSS LEARNING PATTERNS THAT PREDICT EVEN GREATER SUCCESS



REMEMBER, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES CANNOT DO THE PRACTICE LEADERS NEED TO DO FOR THEMSELVES

IMAGINE THE FUTURE

We began this report by suggesting digital technology could radically disrupt the practice of leadership development. We can now see how that could happen.

In some companies, features of the future are already here. In others, it is still on the horizon.

To bring it to life, we imagine the future of leadership development could be like this:

COMING SOON

As knowledge and learning resource centres focus their efforts on personalised content curation, leaders will have more relevant, useful and reliable insights at their fingertips, in the moment they need it. As comfort with social media improves, leaders will have immediate access to colleagues with whom they can share ideas and develop new ones.

INTELLIGENT AGENTS

The structure of personal and collaborative learning/performing platforms will have intelligent agents that prompt and question users to help them create more robust and value-adding ideas of their own. They will also encourage users to critically reflect on and learn from their experience and so help them adapt and change their assumptions, and improve their ability to learn.

A LITTLE FURTHER OUT

A little further out, we expect these digital learning/performing services to evolve into collaborative robots that leaders and leadership teams 'commission' to do work for them. Simultaneously, as we are already seeing, some cobot services will act like a coach or mentor, asking practical, developmental and emotionally sensitive questions, just like human coaches do.

This digital nirvana will not be enough, however. As we heard from our interviewees, leaders place a high value on learning from other people in real, face-to-face conversations. We think the evolution of digital services will increase the demand for more authentic, human interaction. For this reason, we anticipate the successful providers of leadership development services to be those who are innovative and skilful in making this happen.

A NEW "SWEET SPOT" EMERGES

Further, as the development of skills in a leader's toolkit becomes something digital services do, we expect face-to-face learning to be the forum in which new, meta-cognitive and meta-affective capabilities are developed. We think the development and application of critical thinking, imagination, collective intelligence, ethics, social purpose etc., will become the new 'sweet spot' in corporate leadership as human beings seek to differentiate their capacity from their artificially intelligent colleagues.

MEET YOUR NEW FRIEND, ANALYTICS

The application of analytics in discovering the online learning/performing behaviours of successful leaders will help companies identify patterns that work, that reliably lead to improvements in leadership performance. Once identified, companies will be able to embed these patterns into the design of learning journeys for future leaders, and increase the quality of their internal supply of leadership talent. The competitive advantage this offers will lead to the creation of new specialist roles in leadership development analytics.

A TRUTH ENDURES

There is, of course, one important caveat. Leadership will continue to be embodied and expressed in action. Getting better at it will still require practice, in real world situations, with insights derived from feedback and coaching. We do not see the need for practice being replaced by digital, though it will be enhanced and augmented by it.

Leadership development will still depend on each future leader's exposure to – and learning from – real work challenges.

Of course, we do not know for sure.

However, through our research and this report, we hope you (like us) have a better understanding of what to expect and how to take your company there.

NEXT STEPS?

There is a lot to take in!

The insights in this report are already changing the nature of executive and leadership development, and some practitioners and providers are leading the way.

And what about you, the reader? How is digital affecting you, and how are you embracing it?

Your Job

Digital technologies could improve the impact of your work in leadership development:

- What's in it for the leaders and companies you serve? And, what's in it for you?
- Which insights are most relevant to your current work?
- How could you use them and create more value for customers and stakeholders?

Your Team

As a colleague, leader or member of a leadership development team, digital technologies could improve the services and solutions you offer:

- How are your colleagues using the advantages of digital technology in leadership development?
- How are you sharing ideas and using your collective intelligence to find the best way forward?
- How could you, personally, reach out and help your colleagues do more?

Making it a Priority

Next steps and action plans may not be immediately obvious. But we think the potential digital offers, as well as the disruption it will cause, makes it a priority for us all.

And, Finally

This research would not have been possible without the insights shared by our interviewees. To them, we send a big, 'Thank you!'

ABOUT ACCELERANCE

Accelerance is an **Award Winning*** consulting firm composed of outstanding leadership specialists who, with courage and caring, strive for excellence in everything they do.

The way we work delivers impact because, we believe in helping clients generate ideas and solutions for themselves for the unique context that only they understand. We achieve this by applying a powerful set of design and delivery principles.

SERVICES

We deliver services in four categories.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We develop future leaders for the challenges they face and equip them with the critical skills they need to perform well in the digital age.



CULTURE CHANGE

We help executives transform their business and create a culture that enables them to deliver their strategy successfully.



EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS

Our executive transition programme is a 6 to 9 month customized integration process that accelerates the new leader's establishment of foundations required for sustainable success.



DIGITAL ADVANTAGE

Digital technologies improve the impact of leadership development. Based on our own research, our seven point improvement plan will help you clarify how digital technologies can improve the impact of leadership development at your company, and decide which ones you should consider using.

*Silver winner in the Executive Development category at the 2017 EFMD Excellence in Practice (EiP) award. See the case study [here](#).

ACCELERANCE

LEADERSHIP FOR BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

London

Accelerance UK Ltd
WeWork Old St,
41 Corsham Street,
London, N1 6DR
info@accelerance.co

Singapore

Accelerance Pte Ltd
8 Burn Road,
#08-02/03 Trivex,
Singapore 369977
info@accelerance.co

