

Learning = Change

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Creating Transformational Development Experiences

Globalization, emerging markets, new technologies, and sweeping innovations, as well as, severe economic downturns are prompting many companies to rethink their traditional business models and engage in radical business transformations. Unfortunately, the success rates for such transformations are incredibly low. John Kotter, Ken Blanchard, Peter Senge, and many others report that 50-70% of corporate change efforts fail “despite substantial resources committed to the change effort ... talented and committed people ‘driving the change’, and high stakes” (Senge, 1999).

Successful and sustainable transformational change requires exceptional business insight and experience. Along with a strategy to attract, retain and continuously develop critical talent, learning and organizational development strategy. This will communicate, drive, and support the behavior changes required to achieve the desired business results. While the learning component is critical for success, it is frequently undervalued, underfunded, and only marginally effective. In fact, learning and development leaders typically report success rates in the 15-20% range in terms of delivering personal and business results.

If learning does not really change anything – why bother?

In Our Iceberg is Melting, John Kotter states, “People are less likely to change themselves and others based on data and analysis than on compelling experiences.” The key word to reflect on is *experiences*. This is making the paradigm shift from workshops, programs, classes, and etc., to designing and delivering learning experiences that blend formal and informal learning processes to drive sustainable change and business results.

This paradigm shift will not come easily for most companies. Deep-rooted cultures and basic assumptions regarding training, learning, and talent development must move from events to processes, from courses to experiences, from a learning focus to a business application and results focus. The requirements for this level of transformation and advancement in strategy are three-fold:

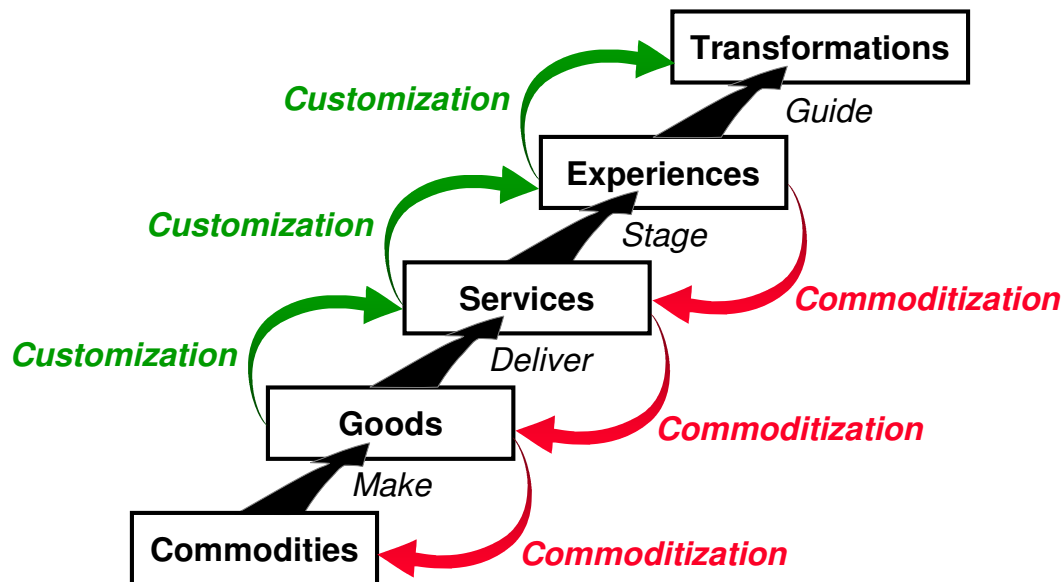
- ◆ Visionary and engaged company leaders must encourage and actively support a culture of continuous learning
- ◆ Learning and business leaders must design, develop and deliver sustainable learning experiences that strategically link to and support business results
- ◆ Participants must be held accountable for and actively supported in changing behaviors and delivering results

All three requirements above represent potentially big changes. We have been taught throughout our lives in classroom settings, from kindergarten to college, and in the workplace. These experiences have shaped our traditional construct of what constitutes training and education. The reality is that when we are talking about transformational learning and development as part of an integrated organizational development and talent strategy, learning must take on a new definition – a new orientation – in order to succeed. Learning must deliver experiences that lead to and support change.

We need a new way of looking at learning value.

In their book, *The Experience Economy*, Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore introduce the Progression of Economic Value (POEV), the increasing levels of economic value associated with increasing levels of customization provided for a customer. This involves moving from extracting commodities to making products to delivering services to staging experiences and then to guiding transformations (Figure 1).

The Progression of Economic Value



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Source: B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), p. 166.

Figure 1. The Progression of Economic Value (POEV)

The POEV framework is easily illustrated with the example of coffee, as it moves from raw beans, to ground coffee, to prepared and poured coffee, to the Starbucks experience (Figure 2). Just over 20 years ago, Starbucks created a customized experience around coffee, establishing a now significant new industry sector—the *coffeehouse experience*.



Figure 2. The Progression of Economic Value (POEV) for Coffee

We have applied the same kind of thinking to Learning & Talent Development to define the Progression of Learning Value (POLV) (Figure 3). There are four important “axes” to consider as learning moves toward achieving greater levels of impact and value.

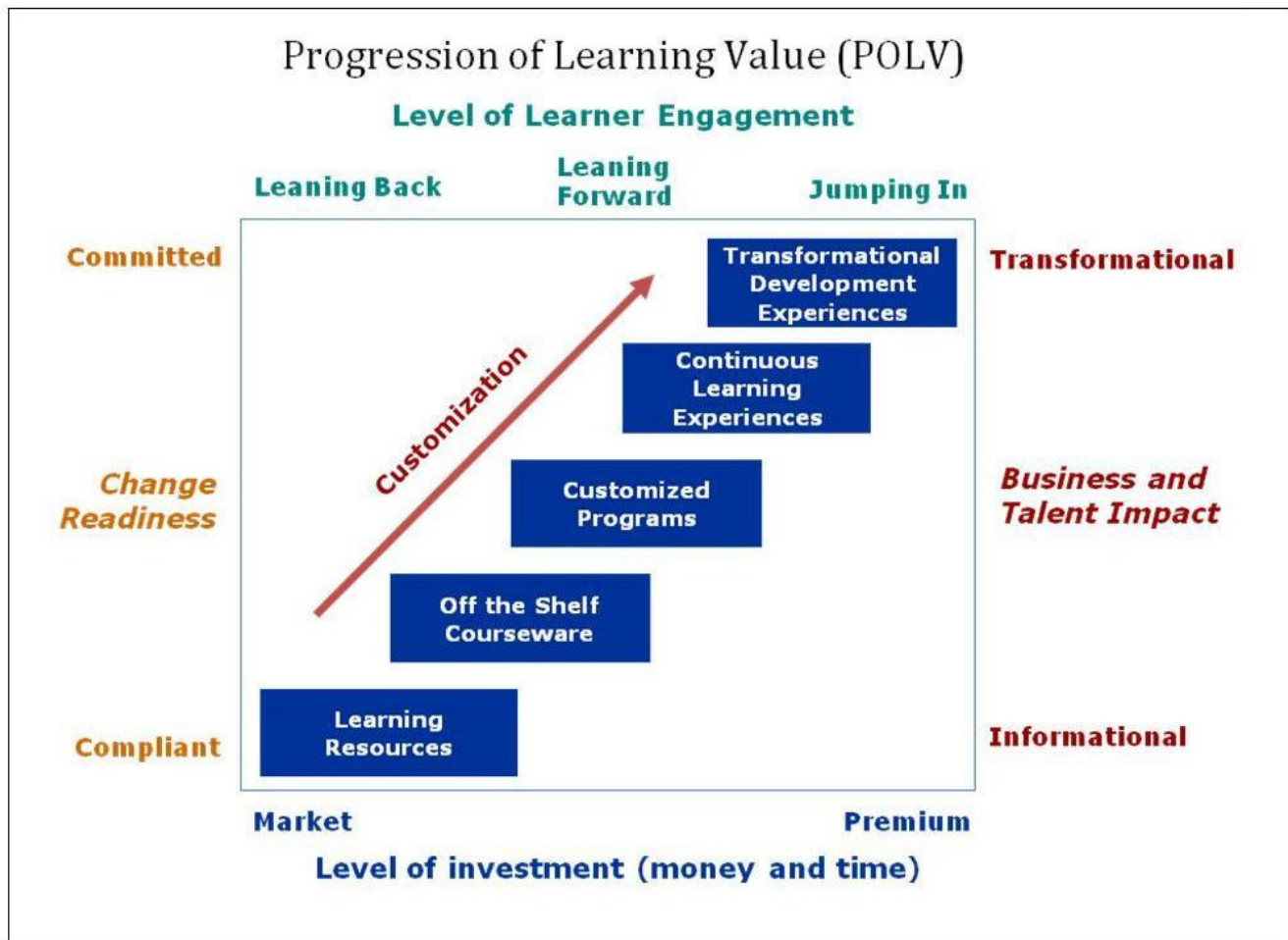


Figure 3. The POEV for Learning and Development: The Progression of Learning Value (POLV).

The right axis indicates the level of business and talent impact that can be achieved, ranging from the lowest level provided by information through behavior change resulting in personal and business transformation. The left axis indicates the readiness for change, for which assessment and planning is essential in designing and delivering appropriately targeted learning experiences. Increasing the level of learner engagement is critical to achieving greater value. When have we ever seen behavior change occur while people are unengaged or “leaning back” in the learning process?

Finally, the bottom axis represents the level of investment. Transformation is rarely inexpensive in terms of money spent and time involved. While greater investment in learning may seem prohibitive to some, the most costly learning and development initiatives with the lowest benefit to an organization are those that have only 10 to 20 percent of participants applying what they learn on the job. Such results, consistently reported from corporate L&D initiatives, would be totally unacceptable in any other area of a successful business.

Within the four axes we move with increasing levels of customization from the commodities of basic learning resources, to the products of off-the-shelf courseware, to the services offered by custom programs, to the experiences provided by so-called blended/continuous learning programs, and lastly to the potential for truly transformational development experiences.

So how do we create transformational development experiences?

In our work, we build on a foundation of *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning* (of which Richard Flanagan is a co-author), and then layer on the thinking, models, and frameworks from *The Experience Economy*. We also incorporate several change models for assessing individual and organizational readiness for change. This comprehensive model has proved to be highly effective for creating development experiences that yield transformational personal and business results.

For this paper we will examine one aspect of our approach that addresses the staging of a transformational learning experience. The principles from theater management and performance so well described in *The Experience Economy* serve as a model for what also needs to occur when planning and staging a learning experience. Pine and Gilmore credit The Doblin Group, an innovation strategy firm in Chicago, with describing the Five Stages of an Experience: attracting, entering, engaging, exiting and extending.

Try thinking of learning and development as theater and every learning platform as a stage, whether it is a live or virtual classroom, a highly interactive group process, action learning, or even a coaching session. This notion of the stage brings a theater mindset into the design and delivery process, requiring choreography of the experience. To achieve this, the learning team engages in the planning process by becoming “experience stagers” and introducing creative signature moments into the learning experience.

1. The first stage is the **Attracting Phase**, drawing people to the learning experience and getting them excited and onboard. It is at this stage that having developed a coherent theme for the initiative is essential. What are the elements that both entice and prepare the learner for the coming experience?
2. The **Entering Phase** occurs in the moments and hours before an individual actually enters the formal learning experience. Think of the opening ceremonies of the Olympics to appreciate the value of this phase for preparing participants for the events to follow.
3. In the **Engaging Phase**, Pine and Gilmore introduce four “experiential realms” that should all come into play--entertainment, education, esthetics, and escape. Although education is the focused intent, the most effective learning processes are also entertaining and enjoyable. Esthetically appealing venues and learning materials can have considerable impact on learner engagement. Also essential is an environment where learners can escape from the daily challenges and pressures of work so they fully engage in the learning and development experience.
4. A well-planned and well-executed **Exiting Phase** has a significant impact on the overall learning experience. How well prepared are learners to begin applying what they are learning? Have well developed objectives and action plans been established? Have communication plans for coworkers and colleagues been developed? When people return to work, they typically quickly forget much of what they “learned” and have little time to think through what they need to do differently or whom they need to incorporate into their new ways of thinking and doing.

5. The intent of the **Extending Phase** is to create feedback loops and support mechanisms that extend the learning experience and build in accountability for change. Within days or weeks after completing a learning experience, most participants return to their jobs and lose touch with the material or do not apply what they have learned. A well conceived and designed extending phase is essential for building support systems, ensuring the application of new learning, and accomplishing and practicing the desired behavior changes.

As in applying *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, all of the above five stages of an experience need to be carefully planned and exercised. Sub-optimizing any stage or discipline leads to decreased impact and results. As the data all too often show personal and organizational change is challenging and far less successful than we should accept. Creating compelling experiences offers one hopeful avenue for improving these results.

Transformational learning is a key element of talent management.

A commitment to transformational learning and development experiences can be a bold differentiator for talent-focused organizations in the 21st century. Such a mindset serves as a catalyst for creating an innovative and agile learning culture able to accomplish needed personal and organizational changes. Learning & Organizational Development professionals can not only build capabilities, competencies, and knowledge, but they can also be key drivers in the talent management process. An organization's long-term commitment to transformational development experiences will be a key factor in creating a culture that attracts, recruits, retains, and develops the highly talented people required for ongoing success.

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