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Training – an employee or corporate benefit?



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□ Steve Brooks

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□ 1 Comment

□ 3D printing, AI, development, Digital economy, driverless, employees, Learning, LMS, Manufacturing, Robotics, Skillsoft, Training, workforce



*Roundtable at Perspectives on Learning, Development and training*

At the EMEA  
perspectives event  
Skillsoft and SumTotal  
held a roundtable  
discussion. The focus  
was on new

technologies, specifically robotics and the impact on learning, training and development.

Tony Glass, EMEA GM at Skillssoft opened the discussion commenting that: *“Technology is a driver for change.”* The challenge is the speed of

change that technology brings and Glass was keen to investigate how Skillssoft can build applications to support businesses in the future.

Glass pointed out what may have escaped the attention of many. *“By 2020 the majority of the workforce will be millennials, don’t leave the existing generation behind.”* The biggest cost for most businesses is manpower. Companies often left with an aged work force with decisions as to how to keep their skills current.

Glass noted the change in Nokia’s fortunes have driven home the impact of technical change in Finland. Previously a powerhouse for paper production, as demand dropped, the Finns were lucky in that Nokia scooped up much of the workforce. With the demise of the Nokia mobile phone decision many are wondering what happens next. In fact Finland is doing well as a tech start up hub.

## **Ricoh’s challenge with changing technology**

Bev Cunningham, Senior Vice President, Human Resources from Ricoh shared this concern. She has an aging workforce of 7000 printer engineers. Ricoh prides itself on its customer service offered by these engineers. Printers are often fixed remotely now which reduces the need for engineers as the number of site visits drop. As a Japanese company it has a culture of promoting long service and is trying to do what it can to avoid redundancies. It remains to be seen as to whether Cunningham succeeds in this but there are several initiatives in place to help her.

For example, Ricoh identified a new gap in the market and now have the contract to install and maintain the Amazon drop boxes that are spreading slowly throughout the world. Ironically Cunningham acknowledged that it is another new technology that threatens this contract. The emergence of drones as an alternative delivery system may ultimately phase out the click and collect locations. The challenge remains though as Cunningham added: *“I cannot transform all 7000*



*Tony Glass, VP Corporate Sales, Skillssoft EMEA*

*engineers away from their role, but I can do some.”*

## Can you train innovation?

Other companies around the table echoed Ricoh's problem. In head offices around 50% of the roles were not there 3 years ago and this change is not going to slow down. Finance departments are changing and using cloud based services. HR departments are having to modernise and use new technology to help transform their business, or just retain talent

Ricoh are also an innovation company themselves. At the forefront of 3D printing, with a lot of inkjet patents for the technology in place, they perceive that 3D printing will be immensely disruptive to manufacturing. Cunningham revealed: *“Printing is not dead – its just different”*, a reference to the recent outcome of the [DRUPA event in Germany](#). Glass wanted to know whether innovation could be trained. No one seemed to believe it could be.

What was interesting is that Ricoh are clearly trying everything in their arsenal, from the obvious like redundancy, retraining, reskilling but there is a finite amount that will work. No one yet seems to have found a way of creating entrepreneurs.

## An evolving workforce

For companies using an Learning Management System (LMS) it needs to be flexible. It is about delivering training that helps the company now and future requirements. The millennial workforce already appear to be more transient and there is a trend towards self-employment on short term contracts. Liam Butler, VP Sales at SumTotal expressed the belief that this trend was being seen in the US. This may have an impact on training and companies will need to continue to offer core training. However, an attractive employee benefit may be the availability of training outside the scope of an individuals current role.

## Training for a Driverless bus company

Andy Frith, IT Applications Director of First Group is focused on a future threat. Driverless cars are coming and with them are likely to be driverless buses. That creates a challenge such as what do the many 1000's of bus drivers currently do? First Group are aware of this problem and according to Frith are preparing for the future. They are training their bus drivers to be more than just drivers. One example is improving their customer service skills.

Even if driverless buses appear, they may still have drivers. Their role will not be to drive but to take payments from those older generations who still use cash. While the future is unclear for many companies need to consider how they train up their staff.

## The challenge of global training

Mettler-Toledo International Inc are a leading global manufacturer of precision instruments and services for use in laboratories and manufacturing. Their challenge will be familiar to other technology based companies. According to Michael Redford, LMS Program Lead, office-based staff lack the digital skills of sales and engineering teams. An LMS system needs to ensure that training is applied in each region equally across a multinational organisation. This is especially true for compliance or safety training.

## The round up

Glass admitted that: *“The crystal ball is pretty smoky”* and *“Learning is at the point of need.”* Glass added that training needs to be delivered in the right context and available for everyone on any device. The one thing clear take away from the discussion though was his closing point.



*“The employee of today is wholly different from the employee of yesterday.”*

It is clear was that he believes that Skillsoft and SumTotal offer solutions that can help corporates accomplish these changing needs. He believes that they can accomplish this in an environment that is in itself changing

## Conclusion

One of the outcomes was: *“Can LMS solutions provide corporate training under departmental budgets or are they an employee benefit?”* Staff like the idea of being able to receive training even if it is not role related. Companies need to wake up to this idea. While LMS solutions such as Skillsoft offer a vast array of training course, some of which are specific to job training, others not.

The digital economy, whether robotics, 3D printing or AI will continue to change the nature of the workforce. Companies need to be aware of how these changes will affect both their business and workforce. They then need to decide upon a training strategy which is not necessarily about re-skilling the workforce for their next role. Companies need to consider continuously investing in training their workforce. Training can no longer be a one off induction cost.

Recent studies such as that by [Oswald, Proto and SgROI from the University of Warwick](#) show that happiness improves productivity. Other studies have shown that worker happiness can also impact stock price positively.

Companies should consider how they deliver continuous education. Their strategic choice is important and they can train staff for their

current role, future roles or enable the employee to educate themselves. It will be interesting to see how companies deploy LMS across their firms and whether they continue a traditional strategy or a mixed strategy approach for the future.



Steve Brooks has worked in IT for nearly 30 years, working through different roles to IT manager in a number of vertical markets including Finance, Manufacturing and Real Estate. A qualified Project Manager. He spent 17 years at Savills plc, a FTSE 250 real estate company, rising to CIO before leaving in 2012. Steve is Director of Consultancy at Synonym Ltd and while studying at Henley Business School for his MBA was deputy editor at [www.business-cloud.com](http://www.business-cloud.com), a Dods Group publication. He joined CIC as an associate consultant in 2013. He is a member of BCS and an associate member of the Institute of Directors.

### Steve Brooks

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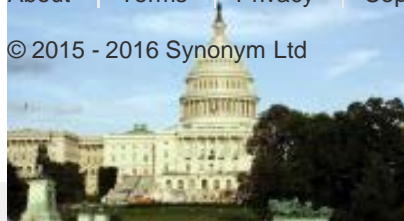
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