



# Reinventing Corporate Learning with a Digital Marketplace Strategy

*January, 2017*

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## Highlights:

Providing a seamless and irresistible digital learning experience to your talents

Shifting to an open Learning platform to allow self-discovery, social interaction and personalization

Matching the best cloud and cognitive technology to positively impact and transform a client's business

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What must your employees learn today? Is it at their fingertips?

It's more challenging than ever to help workers advance their knowledge as markets and technologies swiftly evolve. And companies are working harder than ever to stay agile, to remain competitive in a rapidly changing business landscape.

To succeed, organizations need to offer compelling new experiences, establish new focus, build new expertise and devise new ways of working. Business leaders face a stark choice: Either digitally reinvent their enterprises, or watch their businesses decay.

To help solve this problem, IBM developed Your Learning, a powerful suite of learning technologies. Because of its ability to adapt to changing business needs, IBM's Your Learning can accelerate the knowledge curve for any medium- to large-size corporation. It can help every employee learn quicker, learn smarter, and help the company stay agile and top-notch.

## The Market Landscape

The traditional means of teaching employees – from classrooms to corporate universities – have been overshadowed by an ever-expanding, ever-changing buffet of learning. At any time and any place, workers can use their computers and smart phones to sift through online videos and courses, webinars, social media, published papers, other rich content, and track down in-person opportunities, such as mentorships and training.

Today, tech-savvy employees treat social networks, mobile and cloud technologies as a given. Among millennials – those born between 1982 and 2000 – a global survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers International found “that 41% say they prefer to communicate electronically at work than face to face or even over the telephone. Millennials routinely make use of their own technology at work and three-quarters believe that access to technology makes them more effective at work.” (From “Millennials at work: Reshaping the workplace”).



Think of your smart phone within arm's reach. With a few taps of a finger, you can buy anything on Amazon, hail a ride through Uber, order a movie through Netflix, listen to music on Pandora, and connect with far-flung friends via Facebook. (Other digital platform ecosystems include Alibaba, Weibo, WeChat, Xing, EasyTaxi and myriad others.)

IBM Learning realizes that technology shifts too rapidly to be supported by a top-down industrial model. A fluid approach to match the quickly changing needs of employees and their employers is what's needed now.

“Learning and talent are hot areas in the marketplace and all companies are driving initiatives to revamp their own approach,” says Guillermo Miranda, IBM vice president of global learning & employee enablement, and Chief Learning Officer.

## Moving Learning to the 21st Century Platform Economy

The traditional business model is one in which companies create and sell to consumers – a one-way flow of producing value upstream that's consumed downstream. This “pipe” business model can be found everywhere, from stores, to TV ads to education.

But in our ever-changing world of technology, steeped in analytics and social networks, we are seeing a seismic shift to a “platform” business model. Platforms serve as virtual gathering places where needs, ideas and content are exchanged; everyone can contribute, everyone can benefit.

Platforms anchor an ecosystem of producers and consumers, providing tools for everyone to interact with one another, which perfectly suits today's demands for professional learning.

IBM's Your Learning platform covers three key elements:

1. The core value, which in our case, is learning opportunities.
2. The interactions among learners, via social networks, to engage, to share and to rate learning opportunities.
3. The platform itself, which must present an intuitive and direct interface to the array of available learning options: internal and external, digital and in-person.

Shifting to a platform model means surrendering control over how and what employees learn. The best companies personalize the best learning possibilities to each individual to help them grow and succeed.

## Technology and architecture

Traditional learning-management systems collect, curate, deliver, update, track, report and manage every component of an organization's learning and development program.

But their shortcomings have grown more pronounced as the choices and channels for learning have blossomed. New technologies allow broader access to more diverse learning opportunities. Employees, in turn, want more autonomy in their learning, better tailored to their individual needs.

To handle the smorgasbord of learning options, a more dynamic model is needed. Companies need learning technology that covers not only the usual offerings, but also ones that are social, informal and external – both in content and platforms – and that allow self-discovery, social interaction and personalization.

Employees should be able to search other systems and venues to find relevant learning offerings, get recommendations, and track their progress – all through a one-stop shop. They should be able to mine social networks for learning opportunities. Fortunately, technologies now allow the design for such an open-learning ecosystem, one that revolves around the user experience rather than corporate demands.

But how should such a site look for the user? There are examples all around us in the consumer world. Netflix, Amazon and other sites offer first-rate usability that fronts highly complex arrays of data.

IBM developed Your Learning to meet those needs and much more.

To mine data and manage a sea of social interactions, IBM combined an easy-to-use graphic interface with the under-the-hood power of IBM Watson's cognitive analytics. Watson's ability to work both with structured data and unstructured natural language grants IBM's Your Learning the means to swiftly integrate, assess and curate a vast amount of learning sources — formal, informal and social — and to customize vetted offerings for each individual learner.

This power and dexterity of IBM's Your Learning makes it stand far above any other learning-management system. As Watson learns more about each user, it provides more meaningful recommendations. Watson can also process all the feedback and social comments that pour in from thousands upon thousands of users, respond quickly to trim less impactful content and alert curators of deeper observations.

IBM's Your Learning platform creates a personalized learning environment for each employee, providing a 24x7 interface that responds quickly, flexibly and creatively to the changing technical and business landscape. It provides search, browse, career roadmaps, plus customized learning channels, while its learning analytics link consumption patterns with skill improvement and business impact.

Over time, IBM Watson's cognitive capabilities grow to make even smarter recommendations, improving search results, providing ever better learning suggestions to employees – much like Amazon does with its recommendations for books, movies and other goods.

IBM's Your Learning also taps into the power of social media, so that friends, colleagues and like-minded strangers contribute to help learners find what they need to progress and succeed.

Through Watson's cognitive power, IBM's Your Learning can ask what each individual is interested in, see what those with similar likes and interests are consuming, then offer relevant suggestions. Cognitive analysis can help reveal unexpected career opportunities based on its understanding of each worker's learning needs and desires.

All this comes together in an open, cloud-based environment that enables ongoing innovation through its public APIs. Open services provide clients with a way to connect the digital learning platform to their unique applications and sources of data – while avoiding the complexity and vendor lock-in issues with proprietary systems. IBM's Your Learning is built with IBM Bluemix and Cloudant technology, which are based on industry standards for cloud applications and hosting. This delivers a powerful, immediate learning solution while also enabling future innovation.

In this cognitive era, it's more important than ever to provide industry professionals with an agile, personalized experience that helps them make better business decisions. IBM's Your Learning is designed to do just that: To help transform their businesses and create more personalized, digital learning experiences. The personalized experience gives learners ownership over building their career, putting their destiny in their hands.

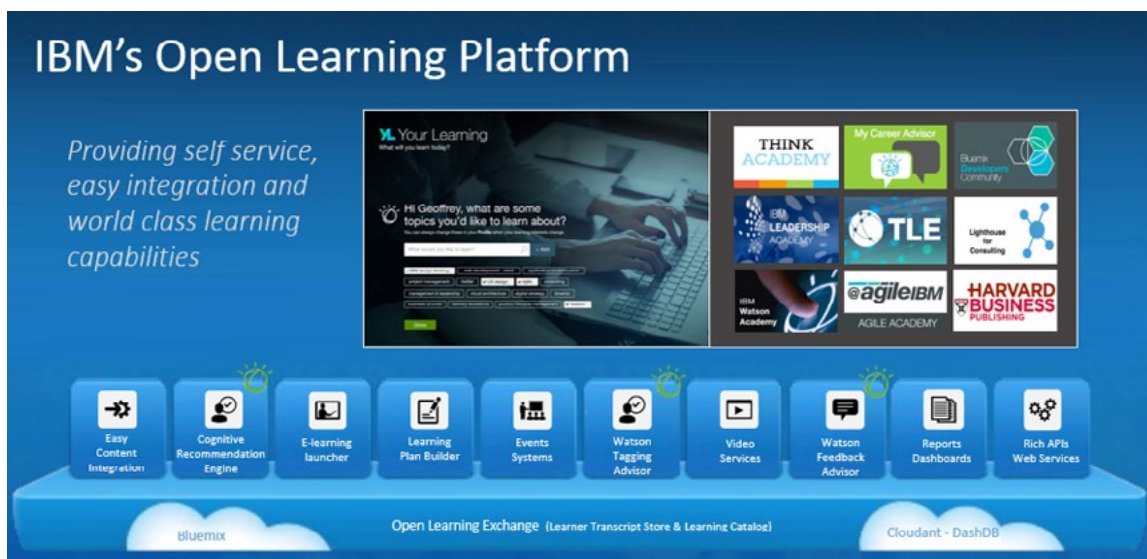


Figure 1: IBM's Open Learning Platform

## Key Roles

In order to manage this new landscape, the roles of the learning professional are evolving as new skills are required to meet the fast-changing need of business. Some examples of the new key characters in the learning team are:

Cloud solution architects, who are trained on cloud- and cognitive-based capabilities such as Bluemix, Watson, learning tools, web analytics and other SaaS based services. They can integrate appropriate technologies, partners and programs to enhance the digital learning platform, which means a better learner experience.

Design gurus, who strive to make the learning journey one that engages and inspires. They continually incorporate feedback to improve the site. They work with clients to find the best solutions for everyone.

Content and merchandise fanatics, who lead the teams that build, market, sell and deliver learning opportunities. They know the landscape and understand what users seek. They keep the site compelling, working to generate traffic and help drive changes to improve the user's experience.

Curator and community leaders, who keep their eyes on the content to ensure its relevant, organized and the best available. They strive to fulfill the needs and curiosity of the users.

“If you don't have these kinds of characters in your team... you will not be in the game because there are a different set of skills needed for this transformation,” Miranda says.

Multidisciplinary teams and interdisciplinary breadth enable IBM to dig deep into every engagement we undertake. The collective brainpower of these learning professionals allows us to connect the right dots among people, processes and patterns to meet the expectations of every unique learner.

## Metrics and Management System

IBM Learning wants every user's experience to be delightful and productive. We design for their needs and wants – and we measure the impact. This, we believe, deserves a fresh approach to metrics: quantifying usage, qualifying improvements with user feedback, and measuring impact through our client success.

IBM's Your Learning manages about 400,000 learners per month. Each day, it processes 30,000 to 100,000 user transactions from more than 30 trusted learning sources. Three-quarters of our learning completions come from outside of the traditional learning-management system. Our informal sources, such as IBM Connections (wikis, communities, blogs), internal video replays and virtual event system are booming in usage.

Tracking who uses what and how frequently tells us about engagement, learner autonomy and – through feedback – their reaction and input to create an irresistible experience. These metrics inform us about employee skills development and career acceleration. And they inform us to what level IBMers feel engaged, empowered, and confident to positively impact and transform a client's business.

## The Key New Characters in the Learning Team



Figure 2: Key roles of learning professionals

Web analytics allow us to better understand site traffic and trends, what devices learners use, what times they engage, what they search for, and far more. We use the Net Promoter Score model to collect feedback and drive iterative change, as well as real-time Chat Advisor features to assist learners in the moment of need. We use the power of Watson analytics to analyze the emotional sentiment of users and predict digital learning preferences.

Adding the power of cognitive and social not only makes the user experience more fulfilling and personalized, but allows fine-tuning of learning experiences. Courses with poor reviews get dropped. Programs that see a surge in interest get highlighted. And those companies offering courses need to constantly refine what they do to keep customers.

Currently, we combine big data from 378,000 IBMers' learning histories and more than 9 million completions and 56,000 learning activities to assess and create better learning recommendations. Each recommendation is tailored to each of our 378,000 global employees' roles, skills, business groups and personal learning histories.

Our students are our consumers; we strive to please them with an awesome opportunity to develop their talent. Our latest IBM Engagement survey again showed that IBMers who are curious

and prioritize professional development are the most engaged. Their engagement is five points higher than those who do not invest 40 or more hours a year in their development.

Keeping the experience top-notch and delightful isn't simply about helping employees stay engaged and excel. More knowledgeable employees connect better with clients, connect better within their organization, and that creates success for everyone.

In today's disruptive marketplace, rapid and modern approaches to track success are fundamentally changing the way we think about learning and development. It's a win for everyone.

### Building the 'Learning Journeys' in Many Flavors

Just as travelers leave their homes for a variety of destinations, learners begin their journeys for various reasons:

- They may be curious to find an answer, expert or point of view outside of their organization.
- They may have been invited because of their role, a job change, or a compliance effort.
- They may have received a suggestion via word-of-mouth, social networking or targeted marketing.

## The Learning Journey

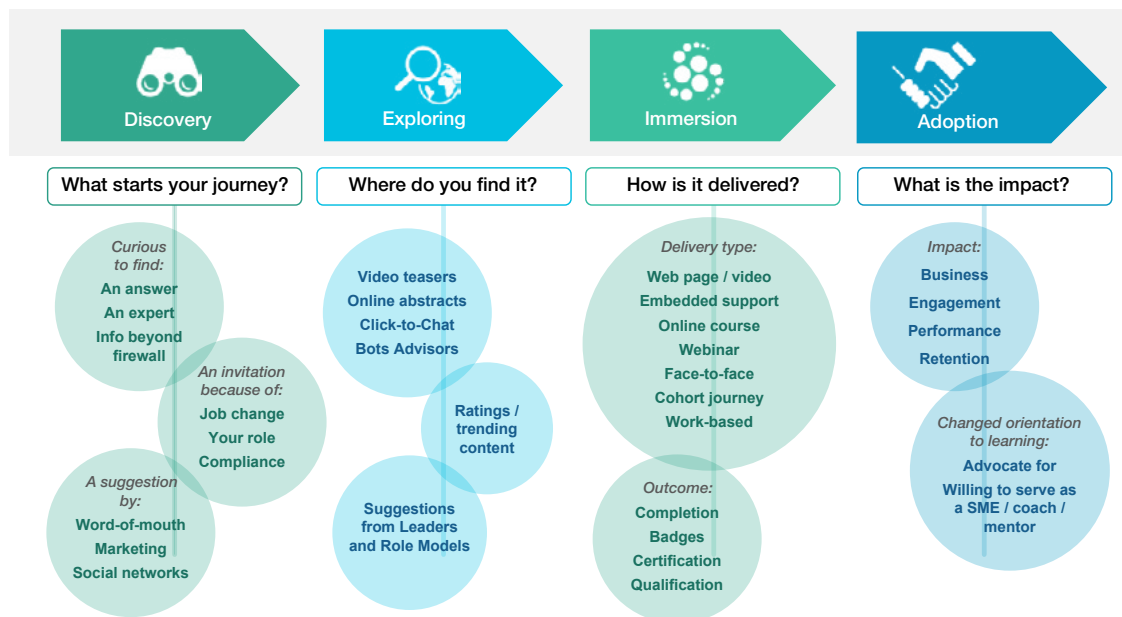


Figure 3: The Learning Journey

IBM's Your Learning's interoperability with multiple internal and external trusted sources allow its features and services need to support all of these needs. No matter what journey a learner is on, each shares these steps:

- Discovery, or the spark starting the journey.
- Exploring what's available.
- Immersion in a learning process.
- Adoption of the learning, resulting in applying the knowledge to improve one's self and in turn, the business.

This journey can last a few minutes – say, looking for a specific answer – or several months, to build a new skill.

We have optimized IBM's Your Learning at each step of this journey to deftly guide learners along their way. A broken learning journey means less exploration of learning, less immersion in learning, and less business impact through adoption of learning. Think of shopping online; a disagreeable journey means lost sales and a dimmer future for that e-store.

The last best experience that anyone has, becomes the new expectation; a high bar for any company to achieve. That's why we apply IBM Design Thinking to solve problems at the speed and scale that modern learners demand. It helps us to better understand the problems that really matter to users, to generate breakthrough solutions and to glide from ideas to outcomes.

Many learning-management systems become dumping grounds for undifferentiated content. In contrast, IBM's Your Learning can:

- Host the widest possible variety of content. Everything can have a URL associated with it –even individuals.
- Organize a huge array of content to facilitate discovery by learners.
- Collect metrics along the entire learning journey, including who is visiting, when they visit, how long, their paths and their successes.
- Apply those metrics via Watson to increase engagement by suggesting learning to visitors based on other learners' journeys.
- Drive more adoption of learning via this increased engagement -- and once again using our unified platform to assess the business value of this engagement in terms of employee orientation, retention, and performance.

A learning journey can range from seeking an answer to boosting skills or shifting to a new role. And it can come from elsewhere, such as suggestions from a colleague or a mentor, or via social media. Your Learning makes navigating this journey smoother and faster so that learners can find solid assets that will increase their engagement, improve retention, and help our business grow through our people.

## Conclusion and Outlook

Meeting the needs – and burgeoning demands – for digital access to learning is critical for businesses wishing to hire and retain the best and the brightest.

IBM's Your Learning is a prime example of matching the best cloud and cognitive technology with the growing demands of learners and companies. It evolves and improves. Unlike traditional learning-management systems, it is:

- Cognitive
- Social
- Curated
- Personalized
- Frictionless
- Nimble

IBM's Your Learning gives companies better and faster ways to connect its workforce with the skills and education they need to succeed as individuals, which can only help their companies stay ahead of the pack.



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