

ENTERPRISE L&D

2024 LOOK AHEAD

ACTIONABLE EDGE RUNNING
FOR LEARNING LEADERS

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VECTORS

I am always thrilled to write this public journal of what has drawn my curiosity and what I will be watching in the upcoming year. I finally found the right name for the musings in this report. Originally insights, then themes, and now vectors. The challenge with writing this every year had been the fact that I was trying to capture a moving target, movement that was ill-represented in a frozen snapshot. The title now reflects this motion and allows me to avoid the paralysis of constant updating.

Trajectories have always intrigued me. I love a good bibliography. It is often the sole redeeming quality of a bad pop science book. And I love rabbit holes. This combination led to my discovery of the architect Palladio whose approach to building inspired my own design methodology. The roots of AI, the evolution of design and the history of labor economics all provide valuable context for today's challenges. I live in New Orleans, and here, as in most cities full of tourists and transplants asking "where are you from?" can often tell you more than, "where are you at?" or "where y'at?" in the local parlance.

Taken individually, the three vectors described in this report have the potential to create new category leaders and reshape the industry. Taken together, they offer a huge opportunity for learning professionals. The subtitle for this report is "actionable...". I hope the previous reports were as well. I hope they spark some discussions and even launch some experiments. I know they have for me. The upcoming year will no doubt feature the overuse of the quote, "may you live in interesting times." I hope that L&D can use this time to prepare itself for the next hundred years, not simply the next budget cycle.

Grateful to all who contributed through conversations, writings, and friendship.



Vector #:

OPEN

*"Innovation is most vibrant in the realms where
open-source systems compete with proprietary ones."*

Walter Isaacson

The Innovators

Open source, open innovation, or in the words of Harvard scholar Yochai Benkler, "Commons-based peer production". Whatever you call the collaborative approach that has peers freely sharing ideas and making contributions as part of a voluntary common effort it has been an essential ingredient to huge advances. The internet, the many services that run atop it, and most recently artificial intelligence stand as prime examples. Isaacson, in his book "The Innovators" sums it up well, "...a lesson of modern economics that applies to digital age innovation: that a combination of all these ways of organizing production - governmental, market and peer sharing - is stronger than favoring any one of them."

While some domains have their roots in peer sharing communities in academia or scientific gatherings prior to their life in corporate, "manor-born" domains such as I.T and L&D have had to create spaces outside the corporate walls for this to flourish. I.T. not only found an outlet in garage startups, homebrew clubs and online communities but flourished. These enthusiasts advanced the domain, creating new technologies and opportunities for themselves. L&D is yet to create these spaces.

There is plenty written on the characteristics, requirements and catalysts of open source efforts. New tools such as Discord, the web3 advancement of DAOs and the widespread acceptance of Creative Commons licensing has made barriers to inclusion and the challenges of governance and ownership less daunting than earlier movements faced. But without commercial motivation, who will spark this important stage of L&D's growth? I believe it is up to the nerds.

If you have ever spoken to a fan of the Marvel Universe, Dungeons & Dragons, or any of the largest video-game franchises you have seen the power of the nerds. First, there is proud identification either as a nerd or non-nerd. Although I have found that non-nerds often have surprisingly nerdy reasons for their self-selection out of the group. Second, there is a clear and shared understanding of the boundaries of the domain. Deeper than simply titles or some shared media the group usually has a working definition of what is under the tent and what is not. Lastly, there is a sense of ownership which is not related to any true stake. These three drivers seem to combine to involuntarily "volunteer" the fan to engage. Errors must be corrected, backstories must be aligned, gaps must be filled, trajectories played out. It is serious play at its best.

OPEN CONTINUED

So where are L&D nerds? The ones who are leaning into it hardest. The ones who spent the weekend watching Masterclasses with a Muse headband on to see how their theta brainwaves were affected during different parts of the session. The ones that want to talk about how breathwork is a better session starter than traditional icebreakers, The ones want to convert Lakoff's work on how cognition uses scenes and analogies into a framework for writing experiential exercises like role plays while wearing t-shirts of George (handsome devil). The ones talking about scoreboards, not whether a simple public scorekeeping system is motivational, but the ones talking about how the rankings, ratings, and scoring can be done with mentions of chess' Elo system, where to set the K factor, and if Planeswalker points were better. IYKYK

Cross domain, non-traditional experts in esoterica, with a passion for solving puzzles. The learning nerds are the industry's Obi Wan Kenobi. L&D, as a knowledge domain, needs a space for them. Now.



Vector #:

GENERATIVE

***The secret of change is to focus all of your energy,
not on fighting the old, but on building the new."***

Dan Millman

*Way of the Peaceful Warrior: A Book that Changes
Lives*

This is only tangentially about technology. But it is where we begin. AI and AR are poised to obsolete the need for a significant portion of corporate L&D's current activities. But not the best bits. Please allow me to explain.

Imagine a spectrum with knowledge transfer characterized by the sharing of specific, pre-existing knowledge from one entity (like an expert, a learning resource, or an organization) to another (usually a learner or a group of learners) on the left. This type of learning typically involves established facts, procedures, methodologies, or best practices that need to be understood and applied as they are. On the right is generative learning which focuses on using existing tools, skills, or frameworks to create new knowledge or solutions. It encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, often leading to novel ideas, products, or processes. Knowledge transfer, the left side, is essential for maintaining standards, ensuring safety, and preserving core competencies. Generative learning, the right side, is key to innovation, adaptation, and long-term growth.

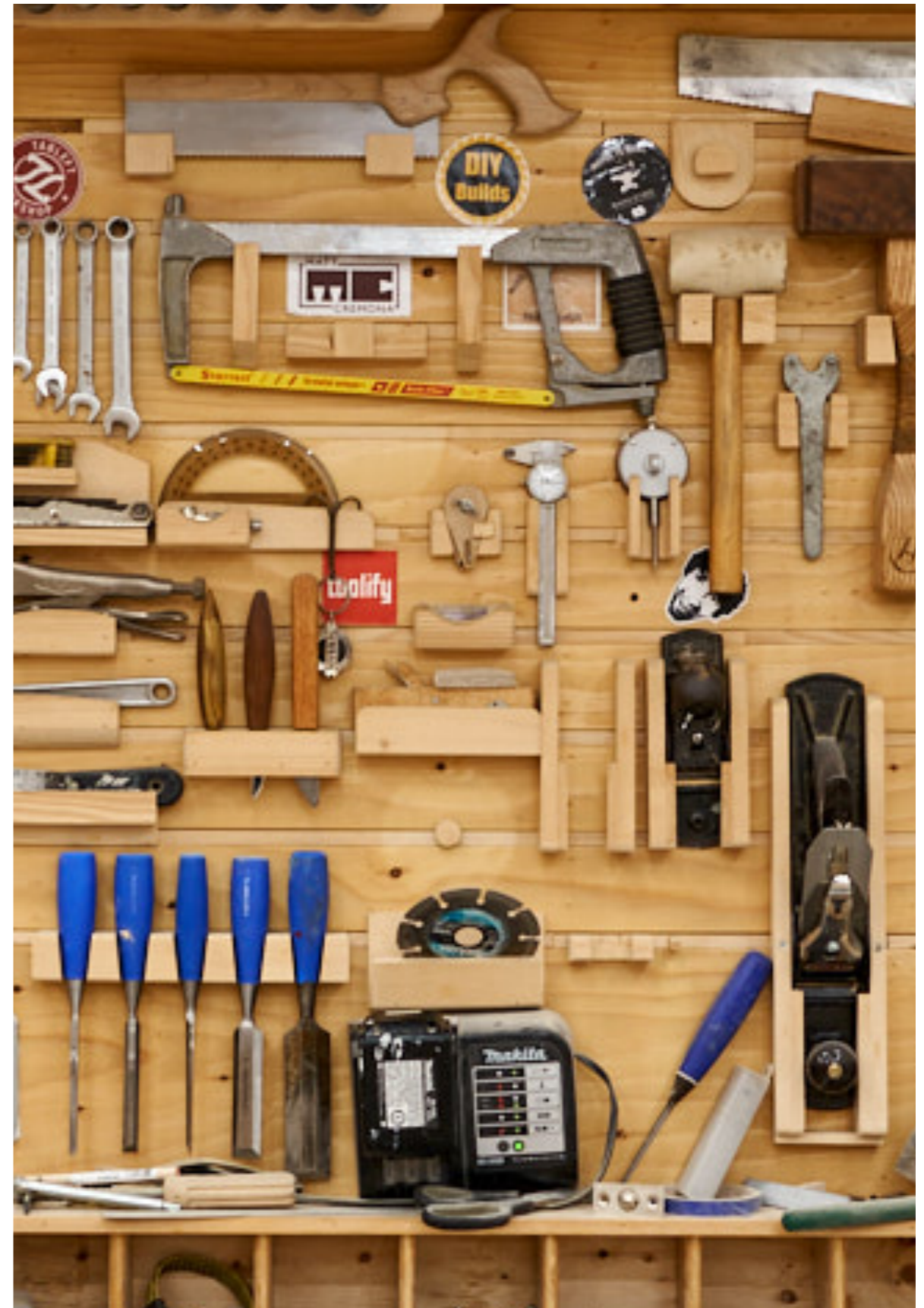
While both are crucial, the left side of the spectrum lends itself to augmentation and automation. The success of technical product policies, and procedures, and general IT courses hinge on effective communication and the low-cost deployment of solutions. In a world where manuals can be dropped into a data set for a trained AI powered bot and almost instantly transformed into a learning experience, complete with video and an assessment, or instruction manuals and user guides can be viewed overlaid on the machine itself via glasses the need for course and job aid development by L&D evaporates or moves to the manufacturer. Remember, low cost is an important part of the success criteria.

Each end of the spectrum requires different pedagogical approaches, assessment strategies, and learning environments. When I asked my bot to describe the difference they responded, "knowledge transfer is akin to providing a map to a traveler - the path is defined, and the traveler needs to learn how to follow it accurately. Generative learning is like giving the traveler a compass and some tools, encouraging them to explore and chart their own path." The right side of the spectrum, the generative side, is where the unknowns and the opportunity reside.

GENERATIVE CONTINUED

Generative learning will reshape how we look at learning design. Changing our focus from how our brains work to how our minds think. Moving us from solutions that focus on the known to ones that foster an environment that encourages exploration and experimentation. When the technologists succeeded in moving our computers from supervised learning (left side) to generative, the breakthroughs came by ceding control and allowing for mistakes. Perhaps there is a lesson there for us.

Economy and budgetary pressures will certainly signal the end of much of our effort on the left side of the spectrum. I for one I'm excited to change the discussion and to see what we can build when we all focus on the right side of learning.



THEME #:

FERAL

"...And the walls became the world..."

Maurice Sendak

Where the Wild Things Are

In 1980's the personal fitness market was a tiny fraction of what it is today. Who knew that people would be so interested in improving their physical fitness. Today it is brain fitness. Our social feeds are full of ads for coffees gummy bears, mushroom teas, headbands and apps designed to help us keep our brains in tiptop shape. And how are you going to show off your perfectly toned beach brain? By learning things.

Opportunities for learning have also filled our feeds. Learn how; to become an influencer, to write AI prompts, to earn thousands while you sleep. If you have produced outlier performance at anything it is highly likely that you are now selling a course to teach others what you did. It's the self-help industry all over again except this time for hustlers, entrepreneurs and creators. Surrounded by instructional videos, white papers, online courses and webinars, learning is everywhere. Hooray!

After decades of touting the need for life long learning and the removal of any lingering stigma of remediation for the adults who pursue it, we have won. Lifelong learning has been normalized. Hacks, tips, and tricks for everything from cooking to small appliance repair are being consumed non-stop. It is almost a certainty that you not only learned something new today but that you told someone about it. This identification as a learner, the pride, the social proof is a game changer and a new learner motivation to be deployed at scale in the enterprise.

Learning experiences are, scalable, monetizable and passive income generating. They are the ultimate knowledge economy product. Learning is the new app and everyone is building them. As the folks that have been expertly building them for ages I guess we should feel like rock stars. Maybe how rock stars felt when every kid in a basement with a laptop started producing songs. It doesn't take long to find the problem in this learning nirvana. Most of the new product being offered and greedily consumed isn't what L&D would call learning. I downloaded 18 course templates from a "consumer learning platform". These were nothing more than single page outlines barely suitable for high school report writing.

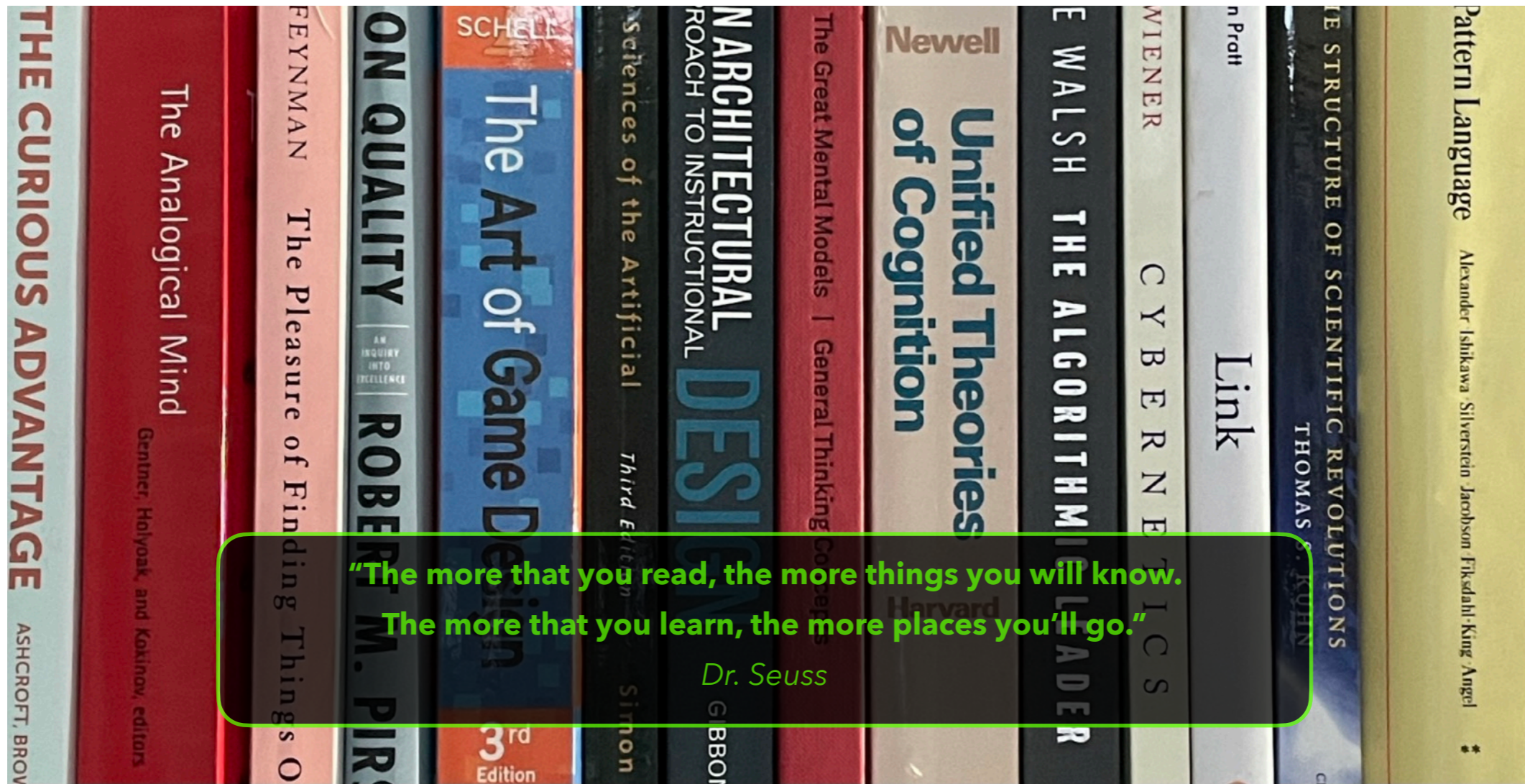
FERAL CONTINUED

While some of my colleagues may feel the need to go “Gordon Ramsay” on the suppliers of this learning, yelling about missing objectives, cognitive theory and neuroscientific principles. Throwing whiteboard markers across the room as they shout about learner personas and measurement strategies. While this makes good television it misses the point. What we build, learning that works, is in high demand and no longer trapped inside the sponsoring halls of companies. In the wild, it is not about aligning with the business. Learning **is** the business. And I am confident that there will be growing demand for quality product.

Feral learning will be a challenge for domesticated designers as the streets require a different skill set. Learning designers must shift their mindset, skills and success measures to those of a product manager. In the wild, the limitations of executive buy-in, new technologies and consulted impact justifications are replaced by a new freedom to simply do what works.

Opportunities for learning pros outside of traditional environments are everywhere. As the market for feral learning grows and matures, the demand for learning products, that work, will grow. Luckily, that is what we do. It is going to be a wild time.





**"The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."
Dr. Seuss**

I have spent the last three decades years in two domains: venture development and workforce development. The common denominator? Learning is at the core of success in both. Industrial Learning, the systems, science and tools that individuals and organizations use to develop higher economic value, has been my primary focus for the last five years. This redefined domain, which places learning at the core of our professional and organizational activities offers a new trajectory for stakeholders at all levels. The vectors described in this report, combined with prior reports, begin to describe the opportunities to resolve the long standing dissonance between the L&D industry's intentions and results.

In 2022 I launched Alex42, a consultancy to explore the Industrial Learning space. Last year, in collaboration with Good Fortune Productions, we launched SkillStack to experiment with new cognitive designs for video (a theme from the last report). Learning comes from completing the cycle. An iterative process that travels from principle to practice, action to reflection, hypothesis to experiment, and back again. It is the speed of this cycle, not the accuracy of the first step that gives it its power. I hope others come out to take a walk. It is a lot healthier than sitting inside.

Jey & Charlie

