Digital Citizenship in Learning and Development: Our Call to Shape the Future

In my research I believe we’ve witnessed four major innovations made possible by advancements in processing power, technological sophistication, academic research and discovery, the availability of large amounts of structured data, and now scaled implementation of these discoveries. I’m not covering the hardware infrastructure that made all this possible as that is a given.

Digital Learning Disruptions:
2. Platforms – The advent of learning platforms allowed for more centralized approaches to learning management and performance tracking.
3. Mass Customization – Adaptive and personalized systems have allowed students to affordably move at their own pace and with their own preferences.
4. Networking – Technological sophistication has made the digital ecosystem richer by enabling authentic social engagement and user-driven discovery and experiences.

Technology and pedagogy have advanced alongside one another, and we’re now seeing an increasing focus on enabling technologies. That is, we’re witnessing organizations thinking beyond manual and physical approaches and what tech is available currently to instead include blue sky thinking that imagines how the best approaches for human thriving can be unleashed.

The next disruption on the horizon is arguably the most significant in human history, that is the incorporation of advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. AI is in a nascent stage in the learning industry, but that is about to change.

Automation made possible by AI is disrupting work as machines take on many previously human tasks and uproot people from jobs. Because of the low cost associated with proliferating algorithms this trend will accelerate and in the very near future we will see this technology further upset our already fragile social structures.

But there is a silver lining. An age of automation means that people can focus their skills on those things that are uniquely human.

AI pioneer Kai-Fu Lee, in his book, AI Superpowers, China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order, says “Never has the potential for human flourishing been higher, or the stakes of failure greater.” He argues that “it will take social unity, creative policies, and human empathy, but if achieved, it could turn a moment of outright crisis into an unparalleled opportunity.”

While intellectually curious, the dystopian view of technology is not one that excites us in the human talent business. The utopian view is what we must pursue, and it is our duty to help shape our digital future so it doesn’t go unchecked and shape ours.
At ansrsource, we design and develop learning content and other solutions for dozens of the world’s best, largest, and most progressive companies, academic institutions, associations, publishers, and technology conglomerates. As with many companies we’re being asked to produce more for less. More engagement, more sophistication, more creativity, and a greater volume of content for lower costs. This industry trend forced us to recognize that traditional methods of delivering learning experiences are not meeting the market’s need for effectiveness, affordability, and scale. So we threw out our assumptions and looked to advancements in technology to see what was possible.

We are in an age of implementation of AI and while the headlines focus on the moonshot projects that will disrupt how we live and work, many businesses are quietly using machine learning to automate their operations.

AI applications in learning can be more complex than in other industries, but the sophistication of technology, abundant structured data, and a willingness to try new approaches is providing opportunities to leverage what we at ansrsource are calling Learning Process Automation (LPA). LPA involves observing and documenting workflows and processes, looking for opportunities where there are repeatable steps and observable decision making criteria, researching and building learning algorithms to handle these steps and decisions, re-envisioning the workflow to incorporate human/machine collaboration, and designing platforms to streamline the new workflow and allow for our human experts to manage more work with greater consistency and efficiency while spending more time on tasks that depend on their uniquely human skills: creativity and empathy. We’ve begun this effort with our process of producing learning experiences that are accessible to students with disabilities and the results have been exhilarating.

These innovations are also applicable to learning platforms, and AI has the capability to allow us to weave together many of the niche and disaggregated solutions that have been built over the past 20 years into comprehensive ecosystems that were not previously possible. The vision for that next frontier has just taken root at my company, and we’re building the infrastructure in AI to make this vision a reality.

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