INTRODUCTION

The first ever Africa-wide Learning and Development (L&D) conference, the L&D Africa Conference was held on 18th November 2020. This conference was held to bring together L&D professionals as well as key players and stakeholders in the L&D industry in Africa to meet, share ideas and promote the African L&D industry so it takes its rightful place on the global stage.

The conference was hosted by Rainbow Consult in partnership with key stakeholders in the Learning and Development industry like The Learning and Performance Institute (LPI), Grow Learn Connect (GLC) of the International Finance Corporation and many others. The theme for the conference was: "Raising the Bar for Innovative Learning and Development".

ATTENDANCE

Four hundred and ninety-nine (499) participants logged in with each participant spending a hundred and eighteen (118) minutes on average. Translators were available to interpret English to French (using the interpretation software Interacio) since some of the participants came from French-speaking countries. The conference was hosted on Floor, a specialised conferencing software. The event offered a program of activities that allowed open dialogue and self-reflection.

MAIN SESSIONS

The first (1st) session, titled "Introduction to Training and Facilitation" had Edmund Monk (Co-Founder of the LPI) as the moderator, Khadiga Hassan Fahmy (Senior Operations Officer of the IFC) as the main speaker; Dr Gillian Shapiro (CEO and Founder of Shapiro Consulting), Wale Ajiboye (Associate Director, Acumen West Africa), Thomas Newman (Head of Mena & Africa, LinkedIn Learning Solutions), Thokozile Lewanka Mpupuni (Group head of Leadership, Learning and Talent for Absa Banking Group) and Alhassan Andani (CEO of Stanbic Bank, Ghana) as the panelists. They all spoke about how to enhance ways of delivering effective training and facilitation programs using various digital media while ensuring maximum impact and avoiding common pitfalls. It was an interactive interview because they all gave an in depth understanding of their experiences.

The second (2nd) session had Edmund Monk as the speaker and the session titled "Introduction to the Future of Learning". Edmund Monk predicted five (5) things that will happen in the workplace learning:

- Scales mapping will chart the future workforce. It will be essential.
- Focus Capability Academies will replace ad hoc training.
- Communities of practice will help keep scales up to date, quickly and rapidly to complement indebt learning offered by capability academies.
- The L&D function is going to rapidly reform.
- Organizations are going to build internal talent market places.

He also added that:

Since the discovery of COVID-19, organizations have been forced to adopt to digital and virtual learning programs.

He further stated that 18.6% of individuals surveyed in a recent European survey around L&D preferences disclosed that the preferred way of learning for work was through the virtual classroom.

He also pointed out that easy accessibility of information through the use of the internet has replaced knowledge retention as power within business.

There was a body break after the first (1st) session that lasted for ten (10) minutes.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout 1: Using Data, AI for Learning.

Peter Bamkole (Director, EDC Pan-Atlantic University) and Kevin M Yates (L&D Detective) were the panelists for this session.

Kevin M Yates spoke about how he measures the impact of training and learning of talent development and how he uses data, analytics, evidence and clues to work as an L&D detective. He also shared with the delegates his L&D detective guiding principles:

- Performance is the North Star for impact investigation.
- Impact is intentional, specific, purposeful and targeted.
- If you don't plan for impact in the beginning, it will be difficult to measure in the end.
- Find one thing about performance you can attribute to learning and let that lead to the facts for impact.
- Investigating impact may not be easy, but it is possible.

Peter Bamkole spoke about how effective learning requires data to be processed quickly into information and used dynamically. He also added that there are four (4) key areas that Artificial Intelligence help in effective learning:

- Learning Assistant – routine tasks
- Customized learning – mapping the class
- Course mapping and redesigning
- Virtual Facilitator

Breakout 2: Training, Talent, Technology and Tradeoffs.

Abdul Makubuya (Organizational Development Manager, National Social Security Fund, Uganda) and Caroline Nyamwaya Mwazi (Chief Change Catalyst, Huru Consult Ltd) were the panelists for this session.

Caroline Nyamwaya Mwazi spoke about what the L&D landscape looked like before covid-19.

- Training was done face to face.
- Trainer / Facilitator led
- There were very limited virtual events.

She also spoke about the current learning strategies being adopted to support training and technology such as:

- Steep change curve
- Separated workforce
- Electronic – Learning has been enhanced
- Live virtual training
- Investment in hardware and platforms
- Minimal resumption of face-to-face learning

Caroline Nyamwaya Mwazi added the that changing technology landscape has had an impact on organizations in the sense that time has been saved, money has been saved, learning is still proceeding, learning has been redesigned and also there has been an investment in hardware, platforms and internet connectivity.

Abdul Makubuya spoke about technology drivers in workplace learning. These included:

- Digitalization
- Exponential Information Growth
- Changing Learning Habits
- Multigeneration of Workforce
- Emerging Gig Workforce

He also presented on the strategies to adopt to training and technology:

- Micro-Learning
- Learning on the go
- Gamification
- Curated Personalized Learning
- Curate Social Learning i.e., Collaborative and Team-based Learning

Breakout 3: Remote Learning, Risks and Rewards.

Peter Crabbe (HR Manager L&D, Reward & HR Shared Service, Vodafone Ghana) and Ashraf Shenouda (Founder and Managing Director, AGS & Associates, Egypt) were the panelists for this session.

Ashraf Shenouda presented on the risks and rewards relating to remote learning.

Rewards relating to Remote Learning:

- Africa`s iGDP could reach $712 billion by 2052.

- Creation of more job opportunities.
- Inclusivity and Diversity are progressing.

Risks and Challenges in Remote Learning:

- Losing the human aspect
- Not coping with the current and future challenges – opportunities
- Not creating a Learning Culture
- Follow-up on learning transfer
- Losing the relevant mix for a learning experience

Peter Crabbe presented on the evolution, elements/structure of remote learning and its risk and rewards.

Rewards of Remote Learning to both the Employer and Employee

- Convenient
- Efficient (cost efficient, targeted/relevance)
- Access to global resource, local and international experts.
- Personalisation
- Global reach – delegates
- Collaborative or social learning
- Consistency

Risks or Disadvantages of Remote Learning to the Employer and Employee

- Distraction
- Connectivity problems (internet/electricity)
- Tracking participation & attention is a problem
- Inaccessibility to digital tools
- Struggles with the use of collaborative tools/apps
- Lack of digital learning design capability
- Privacy challenges
- Leadership commitment

Breakout 4: Creating a Learning Culture.

Charlotte Mokoena (Executive Vice President: Human Resource and Stakeholder relations, SASOL) and Dr Hannah Gore (Learning Experience Director, The Canonbury Consultancy Group) were the panelists for this session.

In this session, the panelists presented on the organizations and structures that help to build an effective learning culture.

Charlotte Mokoena presented on the roles of L&D practitioners as catalysts in culture change. She also presented on the things to look out for when creating a learning culture:

- Why do you want to create a learning culture?
- What needs change and readjustment?
- The learning process needs to be effective.
- Learning has to be relevant and transformative.
- It has to be a community that curates the content and the delivering faculty have to understand the eco-system of learning.

Dr Hannah Gore elucidated what a learning culture is, why we need one, how we get one, what the benefits are and also how we embed it.

Why do we need one?

A learning culture can either make or break an organization. Your learning culture has to be integrated into your organization for it to be successful.

How do we get one?

- With time and persistence.
- Picture yourself in the running.

What are the benefits?

- Increases talent attraction in the organization.
- Increases employee satisfaction, efficiency and productivity.

How do we embed it?

- Business negotiation skills
- Communication skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Understanding business strategy rededicate

Breakout 5: Future of Work.

Amina Zghal Bouzguenda (CEO, Universitè Paris-Dauphine|Tunis) and Myles Runham (Independent Consultant, Myles Runham Digital & Learning) were the panelists for this session. They both presented on how the future of work looks like. They also added that skills are important but the role of L&D goes beyond that.

Myles Runham spoke about the future of work from a digital perspective. He said that digital change is built on the foundation of data and connection. These are really important fundamentals to a successful digital experience. He added that the value of digital change is not in the technology itself but rather the user of the technology and what that can do for us individuals and how we can service the needs of people in groups, communities and teams as we work.

Amina Zghal Bouzguenda spoke about trends after the COVID-19 crisis. These included:

- Acceleration of digital information.
- Remote working has become the standard.
- Extended interest for sustainability and green economy.
- Skills needed for the jobs of the future
- Analytical thinking and innovation
- Active learning and learning strategies
- Complex problem solving
- Complex platform solving
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Creativity, originality and initiative
- Leadership and social influence
- Technology use, monitoring and control
- Technology design and programming
- Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
- Reasoning, problem solving and ideation

CONCLUSION

Wrapping up, Edmund Monk ended the conference by saying that the L&D industry is intrinsic to people's lives and it is their responsibility to change lives. L&D needs to be helping people make sense of the world around them. He also added that L&D can impact the wellbeing of companies by helping them make the right connections.

Baaba Jackson, a partner of Rainbow Consult shared her vote of thanks and Margaret Jackson, the Managing Partner of Rainbow Consult gave the closing remarks.

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