

Digital learning in DACH



In partnership with

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Executive summary



With Germany's economy currently the largest in Europe¹ and Switzerland's GDP one of the highest per capita in the world, the DACH region is thriving, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic. Over 100 million people live, work and learn in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. And many of the organizations here are not just large in terms of size and stature, but are true global icons across automotive, banking, pharmaceuticals and beyond.

Despite this, research suggests that the digital transformation of companies in the DACH region, prior to COVID-19, was more 'conservative' than some of their international counterparts. Under this umbrella, we can count the evolution of e-learning too. Interestingly, data suggests that whilst German-speaking organizations have been strong adopters of traditional e-learning courses, mostly in line with global figures, they have been slower to embrace broader digital learning trends. Chatbots, AI-driven machine learning, microlearning and even virtual classrooms lag behind countries like the UK and the USA.²

Why is this? The answer lies at least partly in the more conservative nature of the industries that dominate the region and the sometimes risk-averse mindset of the L&D professionals this has made digitalization and innovation extremely challenging.

This backdrop creates an array of implications for people and organizations working and learning inside DACH. And potentially the opportunity for digital learning to make a real difference.

To dig deeper into this and understand the opportunities that HR, talent and learning leaders could leverage better to their advantage, UNLEASH partnered with CrossKnowledge to unpack insights and experiences from the frontline in an closed-doors, executive roundtable.

Now, for the first time, we're delighted to share insights in this exclusive report.

We hope you enjoy reading about the findings and would be delighted to discuss them with you at any time.

With kind regards,



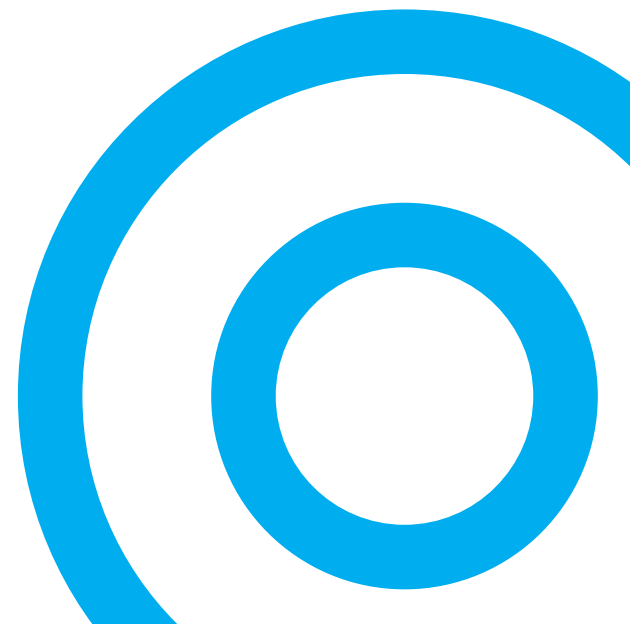
KATE GRAHAM
Head of Content Labs and Insights
UNLEASH

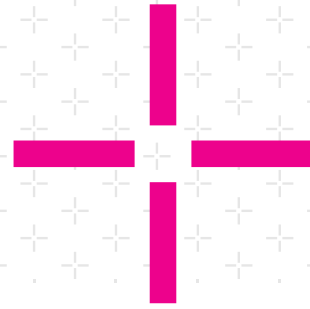


JAN RIJKEN
LEARNING DIRECTOR
CROSSKNOWLEDGE

¹ [Forbes](#)

² [eLearning Journal Benchmarking Study: Digital Transformation](#)





Who took part?

UNLEASH and CrossKnowledge were thrilled to welcome roundtable participants from a wide range of organizations across the DACH countries. These included representatives from a number of industries such as chemicals, automotive, pharmaceuticals, media and IT.



The guest speaker for the session was Richard Klein, head of leadership and people development at Evonik, a world leader in specialty chemicals. UNLEASH roundtables are always run in confidence so the findings here are mostly non-attributable, but as our guest speaker, Richard's key quotes and insights are highlighted throughout.

EVONIK

ONE OF THE LARGEST
SPECIALTY CHEMICALS
COMPANIES IN THE WORLD

**€12.2
BILLION**

TURNOVER SPANNING
100 COUNTRIES
WORLDWIDE

**ROOTS IN
TRADITIONAL**

CLASSROOM TRAINING
IN-PERSON

**OVER
33,000**

PEOPLE

HERITAGE BRAND

EVONIK'S HISTORY GOES BACK TO 1847 WITH ONE OF THE PREDECESSOR COMPANIES,
DEGUSSA, BEING FOUNDED IN 1847

Evonik's e-learning evolution

Since the world changed forever two years ago, digital learning has become the only show in town when it comes to training and development. The pandemic accelerated L&D's transformation faster than anybody could ever have anticipated. And nobody is rushing back to the classroom just yet. Particularly in areas of DACH that have been hit hardest by Covid-19.

Evonik's journey encapsulates a classic e-learning evolution...up to a point. Then its innovation and ambition around digital learning accelerated, bypassing the average organization in DACH and leapfrogging the competition.

"In just four years, Evonik has gone from not having a learning platform, to having a decentralized model where there is a learning team attached to every function - and such demand for digital learning that everyone wants to build out learning journeys for their people." Richard Klein

This evolution has been positive for Evonik's people performance, as the digital learning capabilities have enabled the organization to bring resources more into the flow of work and provide performance support right at moment of need.

Richard firmly believes that having the right information at the right time is what can really boost performance across an organization. And that's ultimately what matters for digital learning when we explore the difference it is really making for organizations today. He is scathing about traditional Kirkpatrick-style measures of success. 'Happy sheets' are not enough he argues, as they don't reflect behavior change or real performance.



Learning Analytics is often perceived complex and laborious by learning practitioners, but it can be simplified by systematically defining KPIs at the start of each learning initiative. Without KPIs, it's impossible to measure learner progress and the effectiveness of the learning initiative. With them, however, organizations can measure and report on key areas like engagement, impact, and costs at the individual, team, or company level.

Insight on learning impact

Of course, tracking and measuring the impact of learning is notoriously challenging. If it was easy then every organization would do it and L&D professionals would have a lot less to discuss at roundtables and events! But a focus on learning governance and analytics at Evonik has really helped.

Enabling self-directed learning

Richard and his team have divided learning into two main camps – that which supports growth and that which supports performance. And their focus is on curating learning content and resources then enabling line managers across the organization to help them help their people.

“We are a learning enabler, a facilitator, a guide. We enable the leaders to develop their people to do a better job via the platform and toolkit of content, resources and methods that L&D put in place.” Richard Klein

This change in the role of L&D teams, from delivery to enablement, is a strong trend that emerged from the discussion. As one participant commented *“it’s not about dictating people’s training to them anymore.”*



**It's not about dictating
people's training to
them anymore**

Skills as the new corporate currency

Hybrid working has shifted the focus for so many of us and of course, the backdrop of the ‘Great Resignation/Reshuffle/Re-evaluation’ (insert your preferred title here!) is causing major disruption. 41% of the global workforce considered leaving their jobs last year³ which is having a huge knock on effect when it comes to the skills that organizations need in their workforce.

Companies now face critical business decisions around the skills that they hire in versus those that they develop. In Germany alone, over a third of organizations have reported skills shortages.⁴ So suddenly, learning is a part of C-suite level conversations.

“It’s been like a revolving door here, just dealing with massive attrition, then on the flip side, supporting massive new hires - and then motivating and engaging them to stay on with you.”

Learning across the full employee lifecycle indeed...

Some organizations represented are not suffering from the attrition of the Great Resignation, but are experiencing hyper growth. It’s a different challenge for L&D – preboarding, onboarding and time-to-competence, rather than upskilling or reskilling – but a similar strategic opportunity.

The panel agreed that the pressure is on L&D to keep up with changing expectations when it comes to digital learning and the opportunity for people to craft their own careers.

They provided various recommendations:



³ [World Economic Forum](#)

⁴ [IFO Institute](#)

“Readjusting from the annual cycle of form filling for performance appraisals didn’t happen overnight. But eventually it goes through to both line managers and employees that this is an ongoing process and it’s made a huge difference to our business.”

This part of the discussion plays into the broader HR picture and war for talent. L&D is no longer an island, one step removed from recruiting or succession planning or rewards and recognition for example. The boundaries are blurring when it comes to talent strategies. Traditional job descriptions are under threat as organizations become more focused on skills, potential and talent mobility. It is a “big opportunity” for L&D to lead on career planning and feed into HR and talent in a much more strategic role.

This is leading to some fascinating innovation. For example, one participant talked about how recognition and rewards have been disrupted in his organization. Every employee gets €100 and they can use this money to fund their own learning – or recognize someone else in their team, or even donate it to charity. Linking learning to the employer brand has potent power in a tough labor market where the best talent is looking for differentiators and benefits in the roles they are applying for.

“Skills are the new currency” commented both Richard and Jan. And no organization can push its skills agenda forward without digital learning as a key component and enabler.

“Upskilling and reskilling is essential to survive in terms of making growth happen - and making innovation happen - in our organization. The good news is we’ve got support from the C-Suite. A few years ago, it was just L&D saying we need to invest in skills development and retention. But now every department is saying to the Board that we need to invest in order to attract people, to develop people and to retain people. This is good news - and now the technology is available to make digital learning at scale happen too.”

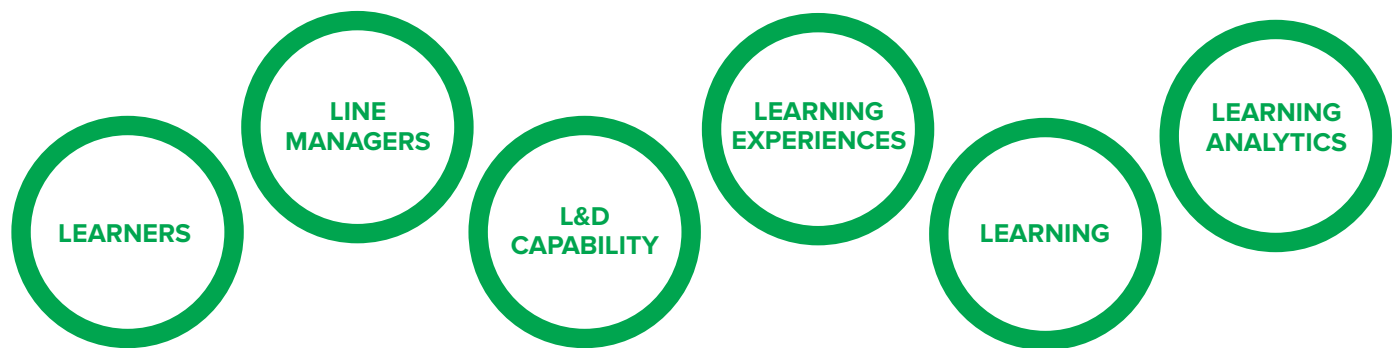


Digital learning at scale

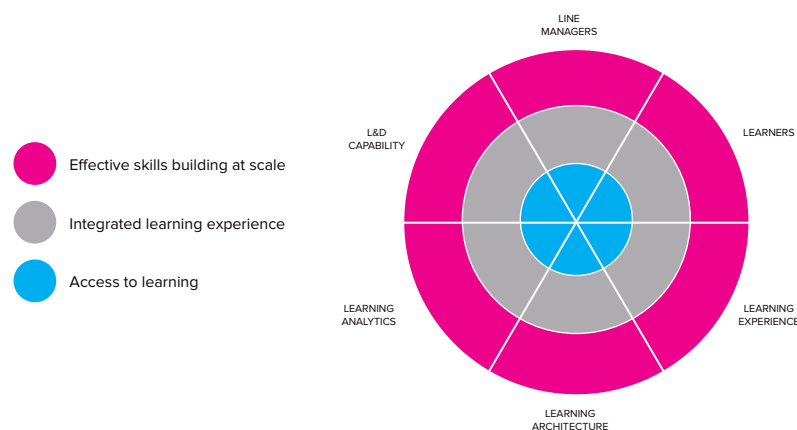
Interestingly, the insights gathered from these HR and learning leaders was less about the tools and systems that drive digital learning. Instead the focus was much more on the more strategic view of business drivers as discussed.

CrossKnowledge has recently launched its Digital Learning Maturity model⁵ that explores six key levers of learning success and helped evaluate the L&D of 200 leading organizations.

These dimensions are:



These are measured on three different levels; access to learning, integrated learning experiences and effective skills-building at scale.



All participants in the roundtable discussion had learning platforms like CrossKnowledge in place, with at least some integration with their broader HR system like Workday. In some instances, the learning module within a HRIS platform was powering digital learning directly. There was no arguing that to be able to properly support and scale digital learning, a fit-for-purpose platform that provides access, learner journeys, can connect to the flow of work and reporting/analytics is key.

⁵ [Knowledge Digital Learning Maturity Model](#)

Learning culture

Two words that surfaced as integral to the digital learning conversation are ‘trust’ and ‘curiosity’.

The picture of hybrid working is mixed across DACH. The adoption of hybrid work varies by industry, with banking, finance and IT leading the way and manufacturing lagging behind.⁶ Some companies do want to get back to their offices and ‘return’ to the way they worked and learnt before the pandemic. But many realize that the genie is now out of the bottle and they can’t go ‘back’ to anything. In order to make this work though – and in a learning context get beyond the urge to track and manage everything (except where it’s for compliance purposes of course) – trust is required.

The discussion agreed that managers and leaders have had to get past the notion that their teams are “watching YouTube all day instead of working” with the adjustment to remote and now hybrid working. But trusting your people with their own development can feel like another level of trust – wherever they are working. What will they choose to learn? How will we know if it’s worked? Without it though, a culture of digital learning cannot survive, let alone thrive.

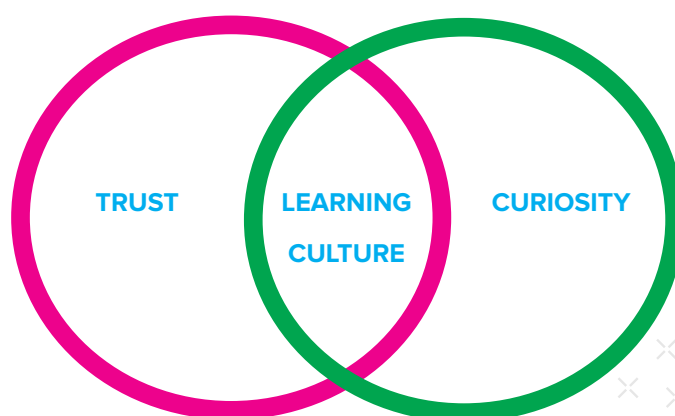
This is also where the difference between a more traditional e-learning approach and truly digital learning strategy comes into play too. The inference with e-learning is that people will sit on their own and click through a course until they learn something. But ultimately, people are social beings! And this is where the full range of digital learning channels and content comes into its own. Collaborative tools, social learning approaches and communities of practice, all empower people to learn together. Thus further diminishing the issue of a lack of trust.

“Assigning people e-learning courses, might well be obsolete in one or two years, because the knowledge is not what’s sought after. Our people want us to trust them, they want more responsibility and independence when it comes to their learning.”

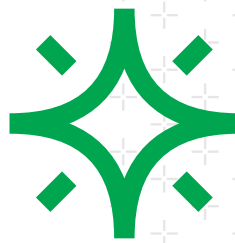
Providing resources that cater for this desire for self-directed learning and to nurture people’s natural curiosity is what can start to set your learning culture apart. This can be scaled via digital learning and very quickly make a real different to the performance of your people – and the organization as a whole.

“I think there’s two interesting elements here. One is the move from pushing learning to employee to, let’s say, self-directed learning, which requires, trust in the organization, and linking it to performance. And the second one is, moving beyond just formal learning. Learning happens every day in the flow of work. So we should recognize that people learn informally – and socially - a lot.”

Jan Rijkens



⁶ ISG Index



Key takeaways

Despite the differences in digital learning adoption between DACH and other international markets like the UK or the USA in previous years, the current economic and social situation has proved a great leveler.

Rather than getting distracted by trying to 'keep up' with the latest innovation or shiny tools in digital learning, such as worrying about using chatbots or microlearning, learning leaders in the region are focused on the big picture. It is currently more important to tackle the mindset around learning in an organization, and its purpose.

- Look for the overlaps between L&D and recruitment, talent management, talent mobility, rewards and recognition and beyond to the broader business strategy – your people need you right the way across the employee lifecycle!
- Learning is central to solving skills shortages, look for opportunities to plug digital learning in to help tackle these challenges now
- Get away from the traditional 'command and control' era of learning delivery – think of L&D as a business enabler and foster trust and curiosity to build a successful learning culture
- L&D has a defining opportunity to take a strategic seat at the highest levels of an organization – don't waste it
- Link knowledge management and learning where possible to make it easy-access for all learners

Having the right tools, technology and partner/provider can undoubtedly help your success. But following the leaders' example here, it is taking a step back and plugging into the bigger picture that will truly help digital learning make a difference.



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It's probably the most exciting time there's ever been to be involved in people development. Technology is influencing everything we do, business models are changing and here are also talent and skills shortages which mean upskilling and reskilling are now essential. And the C-Suite knows it. The question is, are we in L&D ready to meet these new demands?



Accuracy of Information and Warranties

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