

Chapter 1

Ecosystem Learning Through Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Ecosystem learning is what most educational institutions strive for. However, new theoretical insights on learning have emerged over the past 20 years and a multitude of new digital learning technologies have entered the scene. Consequently, there is a need for new research on ecosystem learning, digital learning technologies and digital transformation. This chapter explores the realization of ecosystem learning through digital learning technologies and digital transformation and analyses and explores the potential of ecosystem learning. The chapter is based on a literature review of theoretical contributions on ecosystems, learning, and digital transformation, and two case studies from the Danish pharmaceutical industry and the Danish insurance industry. Based on the analysis, it was found that ecosystem learning seems to be a successful solution in many industry organizations and the two case studies seem to indicate that multi-tenancy learning platforms and digital transformation initiatives are part of the solution.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

Theoretical considerations on learning organizations (Senge, 1990), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and action learning (Revans, 1982) remain relevant for modern organizations - even in the “age of AI” (Gates, 2023).

Learning agility, learning ability and the ability to change and adapt are crucial for organizations because learning is the precondition for innovation, business

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development, and survival, and in an increasingly complex disruptive business environment (Christensen, 2013) based on exponential digital technologies (Downes & Mui, 2000), organizational learning and innovation performance are crucial disciplines.

The pivotal question is how organizations realize that potential. Research combining theories on ecosystems (Adner, 2012), cf. (Simonsen 2019, 2020, 2021) and (Simonsen & Walther, 2021), digital transformation (Vial, 2019) and action learning (Revans, 1982, 2011) and digital learning (Salmon, 2013) and (Clark & Mayer, 2016), seem to indicate that part of the solution is ecosystem learning accelerated by digital transformation initiatives.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the holy trinity of ecosystem theory, learning theory and digital transformation further. The research objective of this chapter is consequently to analyse, discuss and reflect on the concept of ecosystem learning (Simonsen, 2019) as a tool to create not only learning organizations but also entire learning industries. The chapter will address the following research questions:

- what characterizes ecosystem learning?
- how does ecosystem learning facilitate organizational and industry learning?
- how is ecosystem learning achieved through digital transformation and digital learning?

Companies and organizations spend huge amounts of money on different types of employee training and competence development, but in fact most organizations are mere victims of what might be called the great training robbery. Training and competence development no doubt have a positive effect, however, researchers have so far not been able to empirically demonstrate to which degree, cf. (Garavan et al., 2020), who report on the training effectiveness based on a very comprehensive literature review.

Consequently, there is a need for additional research and new and more holistic approaches in this area to make sure that training efforts lead to function-specific and value-adding knowledge, skills and character, cf. (Fadel et al., 2015:78). The purpose of this chapter is to do just that and focus on ecosystem learning.

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This paper subscribes to a constructionist research philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019), which entails that an interpretative and social-constructivist analysis of the two cases from the corporate educational sector has been applied.

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