Leading and Engaging Today's Multi-Generational Workforce

BY MARSHA ERSHAGHI HAMES, ED.D., CCEP

One of the critical success factors for any ethics and compliance program is education. In LRN's 2013 Ethics & Compliance Leadership Survey, 75% of respondents considered the creation of an education program a top priority, and 45% reported that "keeping it relevant" was an important goal for their program. Complicating the challenge of establishing a relevant education program is the presence in the workforce of four generations of workers with very different learning styles.

This white paper provides insight about changes across the corporate learning landscape and what leading organizations are doing to bridge the generational divides. Highlighted is the role of Millennials, and how they are inspiring a new approach around collaborative learning, reverse mentorship, and promoting organizations to empower employees through new and engaging educational experiences to transform corporate cultures worldwide.

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Education and communication are critical components in transforming corporate cultures worldwide. Advancing ethical corporate cultures starts with designing effective education programs that promote awareness, impart knowledge, and breed an organizational sense of ownership and responsibility around business conduct. With today's business paradigm requiring not only legal compliance but also ethical behavior, education leaders are finding they need to shift their learning strategies to adapt to new business drivers and evolving audience requirements. It is now essential to design effective compliance and ethics education programs that reach diverse audiences across multiple time zones and to do so in a progressive and innovative manner. According to LRN's 2013 Ethics & Compliance Leadership Survey, the data shows convincingly that the most effective programs are delivered in a blended suite of modalities, addressing the various learning styles and attention spans of the evolving workforce.

One fundamental reality in today's business environment is that the learner is the new consumer, driving high expectations for user engagement and on-demand access to knowledge. This new consumer thrives in an environment where learning is more informal and social and is integrated 24/7. This new learner-consumer is altering the learning landscape, rejecting being "held hostage" to one learning format. The profile of today's learner is one with multiple layers of distractions and information overload. Critical content needs to connect with them in short, easy-to-digest segments that can be applied in practical and relevant ways.

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The Evolving Workforce

In addition to the emergence of the new learner-consumer, we are also seeing the "Generation Effect." The convergence of four generations in the workforce is creating tensions, with employers concerned about how to manage such differing attitudes, work habits, and loyalties. The four generations are commonly referred to as Traditionalists (born 1924–1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Gen-X (born 1965–1980), and Millennials (born 1981–2000).

Slowly retiring are the Traditionalists, who are typically characterized as hard-working, financially conservative, and having a low tolerance for change. Traditionalists are most comfortable in a command-and-control style of leadership—a generation raised to set and obey rules.

The newest entrants into the workforce are the Millennials, who are often characterized as "digital natives." They are seen as a new breed of socially networked employees, which is evolving the workforce. This new audience is pursuing active learning and seeking to be engaged and inspired. They want to be a part of shaping their learning experiences. They are overtaking older candidates in roles that require an ability to navigate social media. They often demand meritocracy in the workplace and they show an appetite for more responsibility.

These digital natives expect their learning to evolve and innovate according to the environment and the requirements of their roles and responsibilities. Quick to abandon and disengage if they are not inspired by their educational experience, they seek interactivity in how they learn and absorb information. Born into the world of digital technologies, their lives began with access to the Web, mobile phones, gaming, MP3s, and more. The eldest members of this generation are now 33 years old, so we are already seeing their impact in the workplace. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the size of the workforce in the United States in 2014 will be 162 million.

Estimates suggest that the Millennials will make up 47% of the workforce at that time. Now emerging as leaders, they are significantly influencing the workplace, driving greater collaboration and collapsing traditional forms of corporate rigidity and hierarchy.

Millennials lead with communication, seeking to share knowledge through various social media tools. They expect these tools to be available and accessible in workplace learning. As leaders in designing, developing, and implementing learning technologies, they are forcing a change in the traditional corporate education model. Their leadership is shifting training from a leader-focused approach to a peer-focused model based on collaboration.

The Case for Reverse Mentorship

Traditionally, mentoring in the workplace involves a more senior leader coaching a younger professional who is seeking guidance along the same career path. A new trend is reverse mentorship, which is unfolding in some formal and informal ways. For example, a tech-savvy Millennial may provide guidance to the Compliance & Ethics team around how to use social media as a platform to communicate and share information with a global enterprise on ethical dilemmas and risk-based awareness and to provide a forum for moderated discussion. Informally, a senior colleague may seek guidance from a Millennial around how to enable mobility of critical pieces of information so that the sales organization can access information in real-time.

According to a report from the Sloan Center on Aging & Work, in collaboration with the Boston College Center for Work & Family, The Hartford insurance company developed a pilot reverse mentoring program. The program's objective was to help executives become more fluent in the digital technologies its customers and partners were using. A small group of Millennials had already begun an idea exchange around technology. As part of the reverse mentoring initiative, this group was invited to coach senior-level leaders in expanding their understanding and use of social media. In addition to the business benefits of the program, career path opportunities emerged for the Millennials and a newly revised social media policy was developed collaboratively.

Changing Landscape: Why Engagement Matters

Dov Seidman, CEO of LRN, explains why engagement matters:

> To attract and retain the best talent, an employer must engage employees in ways that motivate and empower them. If this sounds like a lot of work just for the privilege of giving someone a salary, remember that an inspired workforce is your best sales tool. Employees with positive feelings towards their jobs work harder, are more innovative, are healthier and are a lower risk to your business.

Source: Forbes, September 20, 2012.

The motivation of today's workforce is changing and, according to Seidman, "there is a very strong business case for doing what it will take to engage the modern workforce." The numbers are compelling. In comparison to peers who do not actively engage employees, companies who do can measure their competitive edge in the form of increased profitability (16%), productivity (18%), and customer loyalty (12%), as well as decreased employee turnover (25%), safety incidents (49%), and absenteeism (37%).
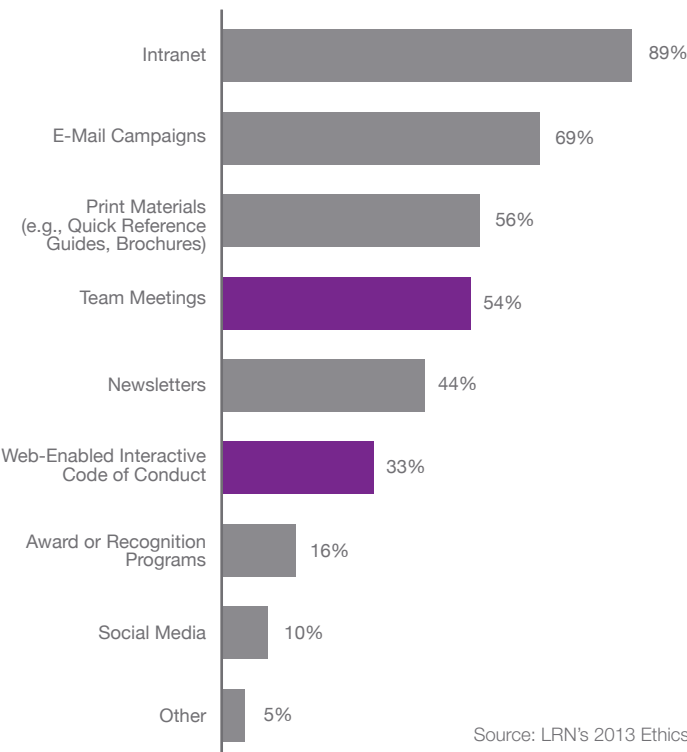
Framing

We have come a long way in the past 15 years: learning design and delivery methods have evolved and C&E education programs are maturing. No longer are programs focused on baseline compliance with minimal learning thresholds. C&E education has moved to multi-year strategic curricula, integrating learning progressions that blend risk and values-based education. According to LRN's 2013 Ethics & Compliance Leadership Survey, 95% of respondents deploy e-learning as the primary method of baseline compliance training. But these same respondents indicate that training fatigue is a very real problem, with reports that employees are feeling disengaged from the learning experience. Therefore, high-performing organizations seeking to promote more robust and innovative C&E programs are now focusing on their "second act." They aspire to go beyond compliance and frame relevant issues in practical methods.

Today's compliance and ethics programs are designed to promote elevated behavior, from the board room to the break room. Leading compliance and ethics programs are citing framing as producing high impact, especially when it occurs in proximity to relevant events or decisions. This approach promotes revisiting their program learning strategies and exploring blended and hybrid approaches to bridge the culture gap. Learning programs are shifting to continuums of resources and tools that support an inclusive and environmental approach to education. Organizations are creating networks and learning forums to support on-demand access to knowledge in multiple media.

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Communication Channels Used to Raise Awareness and Reinforce the E&C Program

Ranked by Percentage of Respondents   n=154

Channel	Percentage
Intranet	89%
E-Mail Campaigns	69%
Print Materials (e.g., Quick Reference Guides, Brochures)	56%
Team Meetings	54%
Newsletters	44%
Web-Enabled Interactive Code of Conduct	33%
Award or Recognition Programs	16%
Social Media	10%
Other	5%

Source: LRN's 2013 Ethics & Compliance Leadership Report

Global Relevancy: Know Your Audience

Compounding the convergence of multiple generations and preferences in learning and communication styles, today's organizations are operating in a global landscape. Diversity among employees and partners requires a deeper understanding of cultural preferences. Not only are there the more traditional calls for a blend of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic simulations, but using framing and context to be more culturally adaptive is mission critical. For example, when teaching the topic of anti-bribery and corruption, the learning simulation for a shop floor employee in Taiwan must be framed in a different situational context than for a corporate executive team in Washington, D.C. or a vendor agent in Nigeria. When presenting the issue of speaking up and non-retaliation, the learning interaction presented to a team of claims adjusters in Ohio should be different than the problem-solving simulation developed for a manufacturing team in Mexico City.

Taking these diverse learning styles and cultural sensitivities into consideration when designing a C&E education program can enable greater knowledge "stickiness" and promote greater adoption of the concepts of the program. Learning simulations should engage and challenge your workforce to consider the ethical issues they face in their roles and responsibilities, and framing the content with regional or cultural context adds an important dimension to its impact and relevance. As mentioned earlier, because the audience landscape is shifting, there is greater demand for flexible access to on-demand content. Try to find ways to support learning simulations where participants can integrate themselves into the storyline, comment or share opinions on the decision points, and be a part of solving the problem. This strategy can shift the experience from passive participation to active learning and melt the typical barriers of global perception or "lost in translation" situations typical of many C&E programs.

Social Media: A Fundamental Shift in How We Communicate

Whether your organization is adopting social learning tools or not, the fact is that employees worldwide are using the tools. Furthermore, the proliferation of these tools will continue and evolve at exponential rates. It is important to determine how your organization can best adopt them effectively for learning.

There are so many types of social networks used today. The most commonly used types include:

- Video-based
- Audio (podcasts)
- Photo-based
- Event-based
- Collaborative tools
- Wikis
- E-mail
- SMS
- Micro blogs
- Personal social networks

A recent study conducted by the Masie Center cites that over 78% of organizations are using collaborative documents such as wikis and blogs for learning and knowledge sharing. Close to 70% of organizations are adopting internal social networks such as Yammer. There is also a significant rise in classroom-based group learning: over 45% of organizations are leveraging live training in their education program.

Providing your enterprise with diverse social learning tools that support on-demand and flexible access to information is critical to promoting greater awareness and knowledge.

Lost in translation? Melt the barriers of global perception.
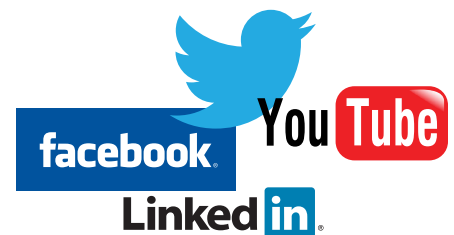
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Peer-to-Peer Learning

Corporate-hosted blogs and discussion forums are proliferating. Leaders and regional managers are leveraging these tools to post topics and enlist employees to share opinions and personal experiences. Some companies are posting links to video vignettes with facilitated discussion threads that enable learners to post their thoughts and comments, or share personal experiences that extend the scenario-based learning. Organizations are expanding learning opportunities through discussion forums, blogs, wikis, v-casts, m-casts, and more. These types of forums promote user-generated content and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. This approach enables learners to personalize learning and find themselves in scenarios, bringing more relevancy and sense of ownership to the education program. High-performing organizations as well as many in the technology industry are capitalizing on social learning tools for knowledge management, building informal learning networks, and hosting expert alliance forums across their organizations.

Collaborative Learning

The future of compliance and ethics programs is collaborative learning. That future is unfolding before our eyes. Learner-directed outcomes produce a progression of active learning. Employees are understanding and applying policies and guidelines through simulations and collaborative discussions. The days of watching, reading, and listening to 75-slide PowerPoint lectures are dwindling. The future is about conversation and application, both informal and formal. Digital natives are transferring more trust into peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, not top-down dissemination. Numerous studies cite training fatigue as a known issue industry-wide. Therefore, effective compliance and ethics education programs are seeking to keep the engagement fresh and sustainable. New curricula view learning as a continuum, focus on a three- to five-year horizon, and implement blended learning.

A supplemental research brief to the 2009 National Business Ethics Survey about generational differences looks at where Millennials fit in:

> The findings of ERC's research coincide with much of the profile of Millennials. For example, Millennial employees are less likely to observe employee privacy breaches than their elder coworkers, but more likely to observe discrimination. While it is certainly possible that the differences in observation are the result of differences in incidence, it is likely that sensitivity also is a factor. Millennial employees are keenly attuned to discriminatory behavior, but are less likely to take note of breaches of privacy.
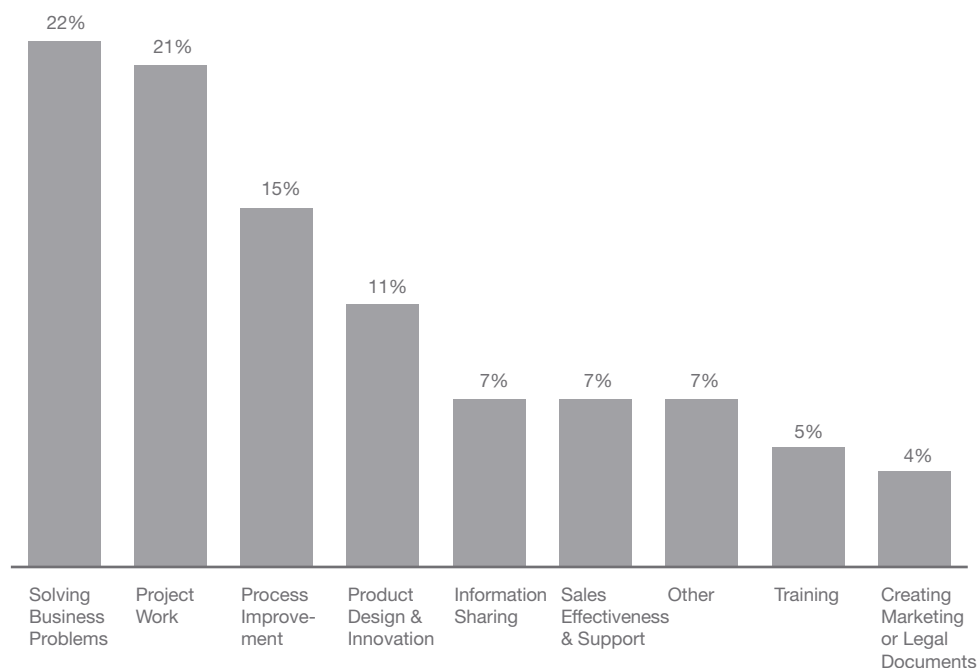
Programs are going beyond compliance, recognizing the need to promote a culture of "roll up your sleeves" shared accountability and commitment, especially at the middle layer of the organization. Organizations are jumping on this opportunity and leveraging social learning tools as a catalyst for collaborative learning. In a recent survey by the Masie Center, over 90% of organizations cite social learning tools as an opportunity to share knowledge and experience. Further, 48% of organizations indicate that the social "momentum" motivates learners in the learning process, promoting effective and resonant learning experiences.

As an example, social learning environments allow the learner to experience a scenario or risk as it unfolds. This can be followed by a knowledge-sharing exercise where a manager-led discussion (either live or virtual) supports peer-to-peer dialogue. As a team,

The future is about conversation and application, both informal and formal.

participants can wrestle with an ethical dilemma and formulate recommendations for resolution. Through the discussion, the teams will have the opportunity to process and absorb the knowledge. Finally, as teams, they will have the opportunity to apply their learning in the problem resolution and learn how to recalibrate and guide their actions toward responsible business conduct.

According to a study conducted by AllCollaboration and eLearning! Media Group in February 2010, almost 80% of executives surveyed said that collaboration was critical to the future of the company. Yet they identified the three biggest barriers to collaboration as corporate culture, poor leadership, and lack of clear goals…not technology. As organizations become more globally distributed, the need for effective collaboration is heightened. Consider adopting a collaborative learning strategy that can be integrated into the enterprise, such as in regular business processes, decision making, and awareness education.

Purpose of Recent Collaboration Experience

22% — Solving Business Problems	
21% — Project Work	
15% — Process Improvement	
11% — Product Design & Innovation	
7% — Information Sharing	
7% — Sales Effectiveness & Support	
7% — Other	
5% — Training	
4% — Creating Marketing or Legal Documents	

Source: eLearning! Magazine & allcollaboration.com

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The issue of ethics in the workplace is addressed in the same supplemental research brief to the 2009 National Business Ethics Survey:

When it comes to ethics in the workplace, some things transcend age and generational differences, such as an innate desire for fairness and an eagerness to work for leaders who are trustworthy and capable. In other ways, though, age and generations do play a role. When it comes to ethics and ethical conduct in the workplace, some groups are more vulnerable: workers who are young, Millennials, and especially Millennial managers.

Bridge the Generational Gap

As you design your C&E strategy, consider the following tips to help promote more collaboration and innovation across the generations in your workforce:

- Present realistic examples of ethical dilemmas that energize and stimulate discussion. Invite your workforce to be a part of designing and leading the discussions.

- Provide opportunities for your employees to seek ways to reflect and apply strategies to resolve difficult situations.

- Cultivate reverse mentorship.

- Leverage social media platforms to converge global and generational perspectives on mission-critical issues.

- Guard your program against complacency and training fatigue.

- A multitude of social learning strategies can be used to help you engage the learner beyond a single online course.

- Seek ways to support collaborative learning using fun approaches, such as experiential learning, simulations, gaming, vignettes, and ethical maps. These tools can promote greater authenticity, commitment, and sustained knowledge retention.

- Design ethical dilemmas that bring true risk into reality, provoking the learner to think twice, and provide the opportunity for them to apply what they have learned in safe simulations.

- Company-hosted discussion forums or manager-led discussions can support the critical-thinking skills that encourage participants to absorb, process, and apply, thus enabling behavioral transformation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Marsha is responsible for advisory leadership around governance, culture and leadership solutions. She provides strategic guidance around compliance and ethics education. Helping organizations drive global engagement and foster healthy ethical cultures, her expertise is around designing blended learning strategics, especially in the framework of experiential and interactive learning methodologies. Marsha holds a Doctorate in Education Technology & Leadership from Pepperdine University. Her dissertation was on the role of Ethical Leadership as an Enabler of Organizational Culture Change. She holds an M.A. from Pepperdine and her B.A. is from University of Southern California. She is a CCEP (Certified Compliance and Ethics Professional).

About LRN: Inspiring Principled Performance

Since 1994, LRN has helped over 20 million people at more than 700 companies worldwide simultaneously navigate complex legal and regulatory environments and foster ethical cultures. LRN's combination of practical tools, education, and strategic advice helps companies translate their values into concrete corporate practices and leadership behaviors that create sustainable competitive advantage. In partnership with LRN, companies need not choose between living principles and maximizing profits, or between enhancing reputation and growing revenue: all are a product of principled performance. LRN works with organizations in more than 100 countries and has offices in Los Angeles, New York, London, and Mumbai.

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