

At the 2012 Online Educa conference in Berlin, a group of over 30 learning professionals came together in the Business Educa strand to create a set of scenarios about the future of corporate learning.

These scenarios are not predictions. Instead they are stories about the future, with a purpose to make better decisions in the present.

The participants first identified key trends and uncertainties in the future of the contextual environment of the learning organisation. These driving forces were then characterised as a set of binary uncertainties. Putting two of these uncertainties together creates a matrix of four possible futures.

The first common uncertainty that came out of the process was the way work is organised. On the one hand this can be structured, regulated and managed. On the other hand it can be flexible, individualistic and enabled.

The other uncertainty is how work is done. This can either be relationship driven, where trust is in human connections, or it can be data driven where decisions are made by looking at ever increasing sets of data.

The four possible futures created by putting these two uncertainties together have each been given a name:

In the "Old Boy Network", learning and development is very structured and planned. This is the world of competency mapping, planned careers and authoritative subject matter experts. People working in large organisations should easily be able to recognise this world.

In the "In-crowd" world, work is flexible and network-based. Development is peer- or selfdirected, and hyperconnected communities of practice develop knowledge around people's passions. Everywhere around the world we are starting to see specialised pockets of expertise like this: from hacktivists in London, to a web-startup scene in Berlin.

The "Big Data" world allows organisations to structure and regulate work by analysing and managing competence and performance data. They will be able to use the mass of information to create personalised learning journeys and they will own the data. Amazon seems to be furthest ahead on creating this type of world.

The last world, "Quantified self" might be the hardest to understand as it is the furthest away from where we currently are. In this world individuals constantly measure themselves. The feedback that this generates is used for development and for proving competence. Nike plus, the fitbit or the Feltron report all show glimpses of this possible future.

If you are interested to learn more about these learning scenarios, or if you want help with bringing the scenarios alive, you can go to www.learningscenarios.org