

CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE AT WORK

Why is it important we keep learning? Whether we like it or not, we are learning every day: it might be a new way of buying a product or using a phone that has updated technology. All this change and innovation means we need to embrace learning.

The world we are living in is complex, competitive, fast and busy. In such an environment, it's critical organisations focus on learning and constantly develop their capability. Many organisations have adapted their learning model from one of traditional classroom teaching to a blended learning approach including face to face presentations, coaching and learning whilst doing. These methods embed learning quickly and fit better in busy work days. There are also some skills we can't go on a course to learn, especially in digital space, as the work has not been done before and therefore the learning is very much on the job, through trial and error.

With the ability to learn it's critical for organisations to remain competitive, adapt and stay ahead of the competition, how do we create a learning environment that supports individuals being their best?

With the five characters of a human culture as a foundation, I believe companies need to focus on the following five areas:

Purpose: Purpose provides organisations with a direction, a mission to get behind, and the opportunity to communicate how each employee's role contributes to that purpose. A clear purpose also provides 'guard rails' and focus. When everyone is learning, creating new ideas, and developing as individuals and as a group, it's easy to get off track. Having a clear purpose that everyone understands and buys into means that ideas can flourish 'on strategy' and be translated into action.

Authentic Leaders: We know leaders are important role models, in everything they do and I have blogged before about the importance of authentic leadership. Leaders have an opportunity to create an environment of learning through 'bringing the external in' and by ensuring the organisation does not get too internalised. Reading and sharing, participating at conferences, bringing speakers in to contribute new ideas and perspective, and by creating an environment of curiosity where it is safe to ask questions, is the perfect environment for learning to take place. Remembering that they should always be open to learning also enables leaders to learn from their teams. After all, one of the best ways to learn is to have your thinking challenged. It's important to be open to doing things differently and to update your perspective as the world changes. Authentic and vulnerable leaders who admit they don't know everything, keep learning.

Telling your story: Learning is about sharing and translating lessons learned into every day operational best practice. Organisations that provide ways for individuals to share their learning with others both informally, e.g. at team meetings, and formally (through films, podcasts, or via company intranets) allow

this translation of learning into the organisation to happen in the most organic way possible. This helps learning embed in the organisation.

Diversity: We all learn differently, and its critical organisations taken this into account. Some of us like to read about a subject in-depth, form views and then debate, others like a planned learning approach with many different forms of content: video, discussions, face to face sessions. The reflectors among us can get annoyed with a discussion group full of extroverts' whilst the extroverts are feeling very much in their comfort zone. Companies should enable time for reflection and processing as part of learning as well. Cultures, physical and mental health, and learnings styles all need to be considered alongside how best to use technology to customise learning so it lands well enabling people to engage with it for maximum impact.

Workplace: Finally, where do you learn best? Traditional learning used to always be offsite, but with budget cuts and because of people's productivity suffering if they're out of the office for long periods of time, this has changed. Training has moved to 'bite-sized' learning with different views on timing, ideally no more than 90 minute learning sessions, for individuals to learn best. Some of us like to learn at home, in the cafe, with others, in the office. With learning being produced, delivered and customised through a variety of learning platforms, opportunities for where and when employees can learn are expanding. Some of us are better at learning in the morning, others in the evening, we should factor that into our learning approach. What is the best period of time to learn? To brainstorm? To make a decision? To create an environment where employees can learn, all of these factors need to be considered when developing a curriculum.

A learning environment does a number of things: it builds capability to drive performance and helps attract the best because of an attractive development offering. It also helps retain the best because they grow and develop by utilising new found skills in a number of ways, especially when promotions or pay rises aren't an option. Creating an environment where it is easy to learn goes a long way to creating an environment where people can be their best selves at work because an environment where everyone can learn is one where everyone can flourish.