

Research Question

How do organizations build a more nimble, always learning culture?

Introduction

Ninety-four percent of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development. ^[1] While many organizations have embraced building robust learning and development functions and creating interactive training programs, something is still awry. The construction of a learning culture begins with having buy-in and commitment from the most essential holders of the culture, the employees.

Recommendations

I. Drive the “What’s in it for Me?” (WIIFM) Factor

Studies have shown that one of the most influential pieces of learner motivation is the perceived value of the opportunity. ^[2] Employees want to be able to identify the benefits of learning and be able to visualize its application. It is imperative that organizations drive the relevancy and importance of each learning campaign to all learners by intertwining the WIIFM factor into each initiative. Building this critical component can boost readiness to learn and motivation to discover additional learning opportunities.

Proposed Action:

- **Promote the Relationship Between Learning and Success:** It is essential to illustrate how each training initiative impacts the employee. Infusing learning opportunities into an employee’s career development framework demonstrates the reward of participating in the learning culture. In addition, creating a clear path to growth in the company by having a rigorous requirement for training and development expresses how vital the learning atmosphere is in the organization. If employees do not understand the correlation between learning and its application to professional goals, there will be a substantial commitment gap to learning campaigns.

II. Utilize Adaptive Learning

One size does not fit all when it comes to training and development for employees. Adaptive learning is an instructional technique that builds on a learners’ essential needs; it can shift and evolve with the employees’ critical requirements in the role. Deploying this type of learning improves the learning experience, makes the content more relevant to the user and builds more valid recommendations.

Proposed Actions:

- **Perform a Skill Needs Analysis:** One of the most significant reasons employees do not engage in learning initiatives is because they are being instructed on concepts they have already mastered. ^[3] To establish a compelling start to a learning campaign, analyze the knowledge and skills that employees already possess. The metacognition theory asserts that “learners learn best when they gain awareness about themselves, and more specifically, about the full range of their own knowledge.” ^[4] Instead of employees spending time sifting through information they already know, an adaptive learning strategy can highlight and recommend the critical skills to their development.
- **Closely Link Learning to On-The-Job Applications:** Tying closely with the WIIFM factor, another hindrance to constructing a learning culture is learners’ inability to link the content of training

programs to on-the-job applications. This is known as the “skills transfer gap.” A strong connection between training and an employee’s on-the-job work can position learning to be thoroughly integrated into the flow of work and stimulate a more substantial commitment to learning. Utilizing an adaptive learning approach, learning can shift in conjunction with the job to present the most in-demand skills for the employee’s role.

- **Foster Future Focused Learning:** A study conducted by the World Economic Forum estimates that 50% of all employees will need reskilling in the next five years. ^[5] The shift in employees’ needs for upskilling or reskilling requires a change in the way they are currently learning in their organization. Realigning the learning framework into a skill-based adaptive learning design will make the learning culture more nimble in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

III. Deploy a Learning Experience Platform

Employee commitment to obtaining new knowledge is fundamental in the success of learning campaigns and the growth of a learning culture. To foster a more nimble, always learning culture, organizations should adopt a **skill-based learning architecture** and deploy it through the adaptive learning structure of a **Learning Experience Platform (LXP)**. Now more than ever, WIIFM factors need to be meticulously endorsed and considered in each training initiative; using skill-based learning through an LXP, employees can visualize their path to success in the organization through actionable learning recommendations. LXPs utilize the adaptive learning configuration to analyze what skills users already possess; this ensures that the content being taught is relevant to the needs of each employee. In addition, this type of platform acts as the vehicle that enables learning to be continuously developed to fit the needs of an advancing workforce, keeping the organization nimble in evolving environments.

Putting It All Together: A Skill-Based Architecture through a Learning Experience Platform

One of the most famous Learning Experience Platform applications is IBM’s algorithm-based Your Learning platform. This platform has been wildly successful and has aided the organization in staying agile and progressive by tailoring each employee’s learning path to fit their individual needs. ^[7] The platform includes two outstanding applications that promote building a nimble and always learning culture: skill-based career mapping and personalized learning content. Your Learning utilizes reliable statistics to suggest trending job opportunities and recommends skills to meet the new role’s requirements. These suggestions and recommendations are considered based on the employee’s current stage of knowledge and the movement of the job market. In addition, the platform also sends notifications to employees that are best fit for open positions in the company. In 2019, 336,000 IBM employees (99% of the entire workforce) visited Your Learning, with a total of 9.1M visits. Each employee invested, on average, 77 hours a year in self-training, exceeding the expectation of 40 hours a year when IBM launched the platform. As for career growth, employees with at least five training certificate completions increased 5% in job performance. The odds of being promoted increase by approximately 9% with each training completed. Learners who spend more time utilizing Your Learning are more likely to be promoted (1.62 times) than those with lower training time. ^[8]

Conclusion

A learning culture is “skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.” ^[6] With the utilization of an LXP’s capabilities and a shift to a skill-based learning structure, organizations can advance their workforce and be nimble in a VUCA world.

References

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