

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Question

What are the attributes and activities of organizations that have created a successful learning culture where learning takes place on the job rather than in a 'class'?

Introduction

With the constant and rapid change in the workplace, it is important for companies to invest in the development of their employees to learn and gain different skill sets to use. According to an article written by Tauber et al. for Harvard Business Publishing, about 54% of the workforce will require significant upskilling and reskilling within the next five years. This means more than half the workforce will require some sort of training and learning to keep up with the changing job market. However, many employees are “unaware of their companies' learning opportunities and have taken upon independent learning activities to fill in the gap for themselves” [1]. For example, when surveyed, 65% of employees stated they used websites such as YouTube or Harvard Business Review to learn something for their job, and only 37% of employees utilize their company's learning system or portal [1]. A big challenge for many organizations' learning and development (L&D) teams is finding the right conditions for learning in which learning is “embedded into the flow of work to make skill development part of everyday routines” [1]. This executive summary will discuss the attributes and activities that create a successful learning culture where learning takes place on the job.

Learning Organization

Supportive learning climate matters

One attribute important to having a successful learning culture is having a supportive learning climate. A seminal meta-analysis on the antecedents and consequences of motivation to learn revealed that a supportive learning climate was related to motivation to learn and also was strongly related to transfer [2]. Recently, the study outcome was endorsed by the study in 2022 which reviewed 167 independent studies with the latest meta analytic model [3].

Building blocks of the learning organization and assessment

With understanding of the importance of a supportive learning climate, we should discuss how companies can create that climate. Garvin et. al.[4] clarified that learning organizations consist of three building blocks and their sub components as follows:

- 1) A supportive learning environment
Psychological safety / Appreciation of differences / Openness to new ideas / Time for reflection
- 2) Concrete learning process and practices
- 3) Leadership that reinforces learning

The authors recommend organizations use an online diagnostic tool, the complimentary Learning Organization Survey ([los.hbs.edu](https://os.hbs.edu), *Figure 1*). The output will show scores on every learning building block as well as the corresponding benchmark scores, which enables respondents to identify areas of excellence and opportunities for improvement. If employees in multiple units wish to take the survey, the company can also make the comparisons unit-by-unit or companywide. By pooling individual and unit scores, organizations as a whole can begin to address specific problems.

Evolution of Learning

Having a supportive learning climate helps to motivate employees to learn as well as seek out different opportunities to continuously learn and grow their knowledge. However, traditional learning in the classroom tends to “have employees as passive agents in which they acquire knowledge and transfer this knowledge and skills they learned for their job” [5]. As research has shown, employees have learned about different job skills more through social interactions such as their professional network, manager or peers, team, etc. rather than in a classroom style setting [1]. Additionally, experiential and informal learning has been shown to “play a critical role in determining when and how to apply, adopt, or abandon those practices (skills learned)” [5](*Table 1*). Ways

L&D teams can promote more of this experiential learning is through providing employees with stretch and job rotation assignments and shadowing experiences opportunities.

Stretch and Job Rotation Assignments

Creative ways that organizations can create a successful learning culture that helps to promote learning on the job includes giving employees opportunities to expand their skills through working within different roles or giving them stretch assignments. A job rotation assignment is when an organization “temporarily assigns an employee to a different position, usually lateral, so the employee can learn new skills by working in that position” [6]. Moreover, a stretch assignment is when an employee takes on a task or project within their current position, “but the task or project is beyond their job description and challenges and broadens their current skills” [6]. The reason these assignments help employees learn new skills is because they allow them to “develop resourcefulness and resilience” by placing them out of their comfort zones and within the learning and stretching zone [6]. During these assignments, employees are using their current knowledge and skills to do their assignments, but also are learning new “skills, tasks, requirements” at the same time [6]. Organizations that can help promote stretch and job assignments will help their employees to expand their skill sets as well as increase engagement in continuous learning and satisfaction with their job.

Shadowing Experiences

Another way organizations can successfully create a culture where employees learn on the job is to provide the opportunity for employees to shadow other employees in higher positions. Through shadowing employees can learn “through a process of observation and reflection on the behavior and managerial decisions of the person being shadowed” [7]. This will allow them to see how senior people make decisions and what skill sets and resources they use.

Attributes to Support a Learning Culture

In addition to experiential learning, having a strong social environment impacts a learning culture:

Social Environment - Managerial/Supervisor Support and Mentorship

Employees need guidance and support from their managers on what skills they need to improve on. A way managers can help employees learn better is to “give regular feedback on performance and skills, have conducted periodic check-ins, and offer projects and development opportunities” to expand skill sets and knowledge [1]. Oftentimes employees do want to expand their knowledge and skill sets, however, they do not know what they need to improve on. With support and feedback from their managers, employees can better understand how they can keep up to date with the constantly changing environment and expand their skill sets. Additionally, research has shown that mentoring relationships is a key attribute that helps employees to learn informally [5]. Mentorship helps create employee perceptions of organizational support that promotes learning and career development [5]. Moreover, mentors give advice to their mentees on what they can improve and build upon so they [mentees] can seek out learning opportunities. Mentors can also give mentees their knowledge and resources about the organization to help them grow.

Conclusion

As organizations continue to grow and adapt to the changing environment, they need to invest in their employees as well keep up with the current trends and skill sets needed to be successful. While traditional training programs were created to help employees learn skills through a classroom style approach, the workplace environment changes rapidly which does not give employees the time to formally sit down and study. Successful organizations have created a successful learning culture in which learning takes place on the job. These organizations have done so by establishing a supportive learning environment as well as giving opportunities to their employees to partake in experiential learning through stretch and job rotation assignments. Additionally, attributes to help create a successful learning culture includes a social environment in which there is strong managerial/supervisor support as well as mentorship programs to help employees develop themselves.

References

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Appendix

Figure 1. Excerpt from the online Learning Organization Survey

Please respond to each item in terms of how descriptive it is of your work unit.							
	highly inaccurate	moderately inaccurate	slightly inaccurate	neither accurate nor inaccurate	slightly accurate	moderately accurate	highly accurate
In this unit, it is easy to speak up about what is on your mind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If you make a mistake in this unit, it is often held against you.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in this unit are usually comfortable talking about problems and disagreements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in this unit are eager to share information about what does and doesn't work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping your cards close to your vest is the best way to get ahead in this unit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Please respond to each item in terms of how descriptive it is of your work unit.							
	highly inaccurate	moderately inaccurate	slightly inaccurate	neither accurate nor inaccurate	slightly accurate	moderately accurate	highly accurate
Differences in opinion are welcome in this unit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unless an opinion is consistent with what most people in this unit believe, it won't be valued.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This unit tends to handle differences of opinion privately	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

GARVIN, D. A., EDMONDSON, A. C., & GINO, F. (2019). Is Yours a Learning Organization? *Harvard Business Review*, 86–93. [Los.hbs.edu](https://hbs.edu)

Table 1. Advances in the form and design of learning and their implications for research and practice

Advances	Research questions	Implications for practice
<p>The social embeddedness of learning has increased and is recognized as naturally occurring in the workplace.</p>	<p>What role does social learning play in human capital development, and what are the implications for human capital of adaptation during learning?</p> <p>In what ways is social learning different from other modes of learning in terms of what is learned and when and how learning transfers?</p> <p>What types of knowledge and skills are learned most effectively in the various forms of social learning (social networks, OCoP, MOOC forums, etc.)?</p> <p>Do learner characteristics such as self-efficacy and openness to experience influence the extent of learning that occurs from MOOCs, OCoP, and social networks?</p>	<p>Organizations should acknowledge the importance of social learning in the workplace and consider how to best manage or facilitate it so that it contributes to human capital resource development aligned with strategic goals.</p>
<p>Learning has become increasingly controlled by the learner and frequently occurs outside of a formal classroom, and its effectiveness depends on the active involvement of the learner.</p>	<p>Do individual differences explain variations in the learning of individuals engaging in self-regulated learning or blended learning? Can self-regulation of learning strategies be cultivated?</p> <p>What role should the instructor have to maximize the effectiveness of blended learning? For example, do enthusiastic, participation-oriented instructors combined with meaningful and engaging online learning facilitate better learning outcomes?</p> <p>Are there certain circumstances or learning experiences that may be more effective using instructor-led training, compared with self-regulated or blended learning?</p> <p>How does self-regulated learning differ in both formal and informal contexts?</p> <p>What are the antecedents and consequences of informal learning? Does it influence organizational outcomes, and if so, what are the mechanisms through which this occurs?</p> <p>Is informal learning an incidental or deliberate process? What are its starting and ending points?</p>	<p>Organizations should encourage learners to engage in self-regulation during online learning.</p> <p>Simulation games are most effective as a supplement to another instructional method.</p> <p>Effective simulation games actively engage the learner with the content and allow unlimited learner access.</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

Advances	Research questions	Implications for practice
Learning is leveraging advances in technology and social media.	<p>How do the characteristics of various technologies used for learning delivery and instruction influence what is learned, the time spent learning, learning difficulty, and transfer of training?</p> <p>What are the mechanisms through which simulations, games, and social media contribute to learning?</p> <p>How should social media tools be designed to maximize learning?</p> <p>What learning outcomes are influenced by social media?</p>	<p>The use of online and mobile technology for learning delivery and instruction can reduce training costs for geographically dispersed employees. However, to realize benefits, designers and managers must focus on how to maximize learning and transfer of training considering the learning objectives.</p>
Prelearning interventions and design elements can facilitate learning and transfer of training.	<p>What are the appropriate timing and intensity of transfer of training interventions?</p> <p>How does the structure of after action reviews (AARs) influence their effectiveness, especially with respect to knowledge acquisition?</p>	<p>Organizations should adopt prelearning interventions and AARs to facilitate learning and transfer of training.</p>

Noe, R. A., Clarke, A. D. M., & Klein, H. J. (2014). Learning in the twenty-first-century workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 245–275.