

Executive Summary Research Question

What would be some ways to promote a learning culture and drive employee engagement in continuous learning?

Overview

To prepare for the fourth industrial revolution, many companies have noticed the importance of building a learning culture to promote continuous learning in the workplace. Our findings indicate several factors that make for more effective educational initiatives in the workplace. First, linking learning to formal performance reviews contributes to a culture of learning. Second, maximizing the availability and incentives of participating in informal learning opportunities foster a learning culture. Furthermore, the most effective learning programs are those that are ad hoc.

Learning and Performance Reviews

To better promote continuous learning, some companies have started incorporating learning goals into their performance review process. AT&T adopted the WF2020 program, which put in place strong incentives and linked learning to performance reviews for its work force of 280,000 people.¹ In addition to assess one's job performance during the review process, the manager and the employee can also take this time to discuss the essential skills that the employee needs to reach the next level of career development.

Similar to the idea of putting learning into performance review, some companies have started exploring the option of designing new compensation programs that are aimed to "pay for skill", instead of "pay for performance". IBM, for instance, would look at the employees' skill sets and determine the compensation package accordingly. AT&T introduced a platform to evaluate skills and give weight to high demand skills, which realigned compensation to better reflect market value.² By putting learning into the performance review and linking skills to compensation, companies made it clear to the employees that it is essential, if not required, for them to reassess their skillset and improve through continuous learning.

Maximizing Informal Learning Opportunities

One of the ways to promote a learning culture is to maximize informal learning opportunities. Informal learning opportunities make learning more accessible to employees, and further the idea that learning is everywhere in your life. One way to do this is to encourage employees to be partners for each other. Google's "Googler to Googler" program is a great demonstration of peer-to-peer coaching and informal learning. By 2013, 2,000 employees had already signed up to teach class through the program.³ In addition, Google took this peer-to-peer coaching idea one step further, allowing volunteers to teach classes that are not work related. This is a significant boost to

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promoting a learning culture. By allowing non-work-related content, Google changed the general mindset around training sessions from being mandatory for work to being relatable to people's daily life.

IBM requires every employee to accomplish and record a minimum of 40 hours of learning on the learning platform. However, similar to Google's idea of allowing non-work-related content, IBM allows its employees to log hours that they put into learning for other aspects of their lives. Employees can log in hours they allocated to read a book, learn a new skill, or attend a class outside of work. This flexibility expands the idea of learning at the workplace and truly ingrained it into people's lives.

A Case for Classroom Learning

HR professionals are divided over which is more effective: on-the-job, experiential training or classroom learning; the most innovative companies are moving towards a combination of the two. According to a McKinsey study, classroom learning is most effective and often necessary during onboarding, when many employees need to learn the same material at once. However, classroom learning must be scheduled and can often interrupt the daily workflow. Furthermore, as standardized material, it's often more challenging for employees to see the link between the lessons and their tasks.⁴

It is especially important for employers to make classroom learning replicate the workplace as closely as possible.⁵ For example, employers can hold role-playing exercises and interactive coaching workshops to promote transformation. An experiential-classroom style learning method often appeals to more experienced employees who may not be used to the traditional lecture-style classroom environment.⁶ See *Appendix A* for a graphic on the ideal workplace educational structure.

Optimizing Workplace Learning Design

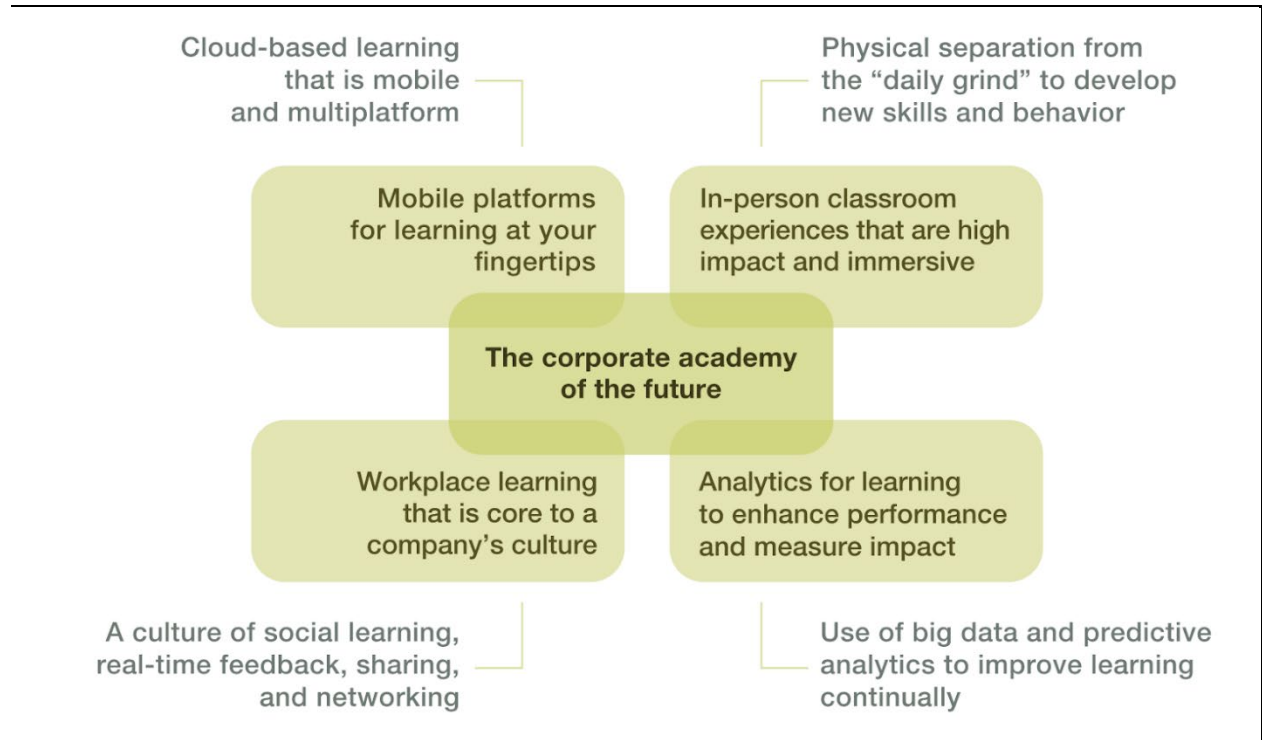
Studies show that brick and mortar learning tends to be more impactful than digital learning.⁷ Several market disruptors have created specialized 24/7 educational spaces in their buildings, some complete with dedicated instructors and visiting faculty. This solution is ad-hoc and voluntary. These spaces provide alternative opportunities for employees to ask questions, eliminating the potential for embarrassment when asking a manager for help. Often outfitted with lighting and ergonomic furniture to encourage learning, the existence of these spaces also demonstrates an organizational commitment to education.⁸

Conclusion

Continuous learning is an inevitable topic in the upcoming era, accommodating the disruptions coming from all fields of societal advancement. A well-established learning culture facilitates the process of employees' upskilling and reskilling. By not only pushing out learning platforms, but also creating an environment to encourage learning, companies will have the right human capital that helps them thrive in the era of rapid changes.

Appendix

Appendix A. Education in the Workplace Best Practices®



Reference

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