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Developing a Culture of Learning

Your Learning and Development Guide to Embedding
and Supporting Learning in Your Organization

This guide outlines how you and your learning and development team can reinforce a culture of learning.

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Make sure that you quantify the impact of learning in your organization.

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By strengthening its learning culture, your organization can compete more effectively, and it can boost employee engagement. So, what steps can you take to further embed and support learning in your organization?

Developing a strong culture of learning within an organization is one of the most rewarding – but also one of the most grueling – exercises that a learning and development professional can undertake.

With a healthy learning culture, people will develop new skills under their own initiative, thereby helping the organization compete more effectively. Learning cultures also help everyone feel more engaged and motivated.

But, as anyone with facilitation experience will know, when learners enter a classroom, they do so with “baggage” – a series of social, psychological, habitual, and personal barriers to effective learning. This is just as much the case when the “learner” is your workforce and the “classroom” is an entire organization.

In this L&D Guide, we’ll look at ways that you can clear this baggage away, so that you can further develop your organization’s learning culture.

1. Be Realistic About the Barriers

According to a [2003 study](#) of more than 200 companies, you need to remove common organizational barriers to develop a healthy culture of learning. As a learning and development professional, you need to understand what these barriers are.

For example, in some organizations, most communication happens in a virtual environment, meaning that it’s difficult to instill a culture of learning by example. In others, the workforce may consist of people from different age groups, who prefer to learn in different ways; while still others will be experiencing changing strategic priorities and cuts to their budgets.

It’s also likely that you’ll need to get leadership buy-in to make the changes you want – getting this can be a challenge.

Use tools like [Cause and Effect Analysis](#) to explore the issues that your organization faces, so that you can address them, and thereby strengthen your culture of learning.

2. Understand Values

L&D professionals often cite a poor take up and low learner retention rates as barriers to achieving an effective return on investment. To avoid these problems, you must understand what learning means to your organization, and you should tailor your approach to match this understanding.

Use [Deal and Kennedy’s Cultural Model](#) to explore your organization’s culture and values methodically. Then, tailor your learning and development approaches and desired outcomes to your company’s value set. By doing this, you can align learning delivery with the way that people prefer to work.

3. Make Learning Personal

A “one size fits all” approach is unlikely to meet anyone’s needs, and it may even disengage learners.

Instead, you need to create a resource portfolio that suits a range of [learning styles](#), and that ticks both the “what” and “how” boxes for learners.

To keep your learners engaged, pick services that can evolve with your employees. Look for material that’s up-to-date and dynamic: this will inspire people to engage with learning and take responsibility for their own development.

If you’ve opted for self-directed learning, download our [“How do you Motivate Self-Directed Learning?”](#) guide for ideas on how you can help learners tailor their study to their individual needs.

4. Measure the Impact of Learning

It can be tricky to measure the impact of learning on your organization, especially quantitatively.

However, this is possible when you identify your objectives and then measure these, so that you have something to compare with later.

As well as the impact on people's performance, monitor indicators that measure the development of the learning culture of your organization. For example, you could measure things like the take up of self-directed learning, and the overall awareness of learning opportunities available within the organization.

You'll likely see unexpected benefits too. For instance, a [2010 study](#) showed that companies that invest in developing their learning culture also tend to be more innovative. [Another study](#) found that organizations with a strong culture of learning can reduce staff turnover by as much as 40 percent. Make sure that you identify and capture these additional benefits.

5. Develop Yourself

Don't overlook yourself when you are developing a learning culture. You must be able to understand the full needs of learners, so that you can diagnose improvements, and deliver structured, meaningful change.

Keep ahead of the curve so that you can spot new developments in L&D, and use them to further strengthen your organization's learning culture.

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