



Creating an appetite for learning

How do you generate a learning culture that engages your people?

I guess many companies have survived over many years without what we've started to call a Learning Culture, but without doubt it's going to be a major help. When Kaplan & Norton first published their balanced score card method in the mid 1990's it was interesting to note their attention to learning. Customer goals, Finance goals, Process improvement goals, and the 4th - Organisational learning goals. They argued very well the case for a balanced organisational strategy across all four areas, clearly realising the benefit of including a learning culture, or perhaps more accurately the danger of excluding one.

To an extent we could make comparisons with 3rd world countries, we understand the role learning has to play in their progress and development. Organisations are not so dissimilar, a failure to learn can leave them far behind in the market.

What we need in our organisations are people who are willing to learn. What a learning culture does is aids the facilitation of that learning by encouraging its progress, improving its availability, and building a ground swell of interest in developing capability. So how can an embedded learning culture be achieved? Here are some suggestions:

Management sponsorship

This is much more than just having a figurehead, the organisation needs to see senior commitment in words and actions which is modeled and evangelised by the programme sponsor.

Exemplary management behaviour

The role of the manager is a key element of embedding a learning culture. Our own research has shown that good attendance performance was influenced strongly by tangible Management and HR involvement. This may not be very surprising, but the study revealed tangible involvement was evident in 67% of a good attendance group, 33% of the acceptable group, and 0% of the poor attendance groups we analysed. The loose ends need to be tied up; Goals, monitoring, feedback, learning reviews all contribute and management have to take the lead in making sure this happens.

Rewards for outstanding behaviour

We have been quick to identify the value of linking personal performance with some kind of reward mechanism in many avenues of work, but we have not seen any that link reward to changes in learnt behaviours. Why not? If we want to create a learning culture we should put our money where our mouths are!

Measurement of behaviour in appraisal processes

This is such an obvious way of heightening the commitment and interest in taking on board learning, we should all do it. We know some that do, but they tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Make sure you add learning to personal annual goals.

Making learning an organisational value

We all have many things to balance and achieve, so don't confuse the workforce by sending multiple messages. What we should do is make sure the messages are aligned, all of them; values, strategy, goals and tasks. Embed learning into the heart of the organisation.

Make the funding route clear and accessible

Bring some real budget clarity to the heads of department. Make funding available, but make sure it's ring fenced so that it doesn't get diverted into other activities.

Create and implement an internal marketing plan for the L&D offering

Spend some time and money creating a professional marketing campaign for your organisations learning. It doesn't have to cost much but will inform, build interest, and keep the theme in front of them. Get more creative than a few scrappy posters, build a consistent high quality approach to your market and sell it like your mortgage depended on it.

One click ease of sign up

We all know how easy it is to buy a book on Amazon, oops I've just bought another one! Make your learning that easy to engage.

Work at removing obstacles

Empower managers to remove obstacles whatever they are. Excuses are often related to priorities, re-focus what's important to the organisation.

Keep reminding everyone

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate, Communicate, Communicate. When you've communicated more than you thought possible, you're only a tenth of the way there!



Clearly we seek to encourage and support a learning culture in the organisations we work with, but they do have to own it themselves. Our particular approach is to work hard at the pre / post learning intervention piece. By creating strong intervention book ends we seek to provide the learner and their manager real clarity around the translation of learning into behaviour, and spread the duration of the learning over a longer period. Book ending also allows the organisation to monitor progress, which aids the development plan and feedback process. A true learning culture takes time and energy to embed, but the rewards extend way beyond other forms of investments. Please call us if you would like more input into your own organisation situation.