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SPECIAL REPORTS

FROM MEAN MACHINES
TO DREAM MACHINES, WHY
TECH NEEDS MUCH MORE
HUMANITY. PLUS, HOW
TO BUILD POWERFUL
VIRTUAL TEAMS.

GENEVIEVE GLOVER, GROUP HR DIRECTOR - BARCHESTER HEALTHCARE

{ TRUE COLOURS }

“DEVELOPING PEOPLE, BUILDS COMPETENCY, BUT THE
BEATING HEART OF GOOD CARE IS HUMANITY”

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

TRENDS FOR 2021 Panicked businesses stuck band aids and gaffer tape around problems. What lies beneath is about to be exposed:

THE SKILLS GAP This white-knuckle ride will see people switching roles en masse and rapidly gaining a completely different set of skill

VIRTUAL COLLABORATION Simply replicating the office virtually, won't cut it. It's a mix of push and pull, the synchronous and asynchronous:

RISE OF EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY Micromanagement becomes obsolete, once a diverse group of people are on mission and purpose

THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENCE

TRAINING COURSES HAVE LONG BEEN THE STAPLE OF L&D, BUT AS TO WHETHER THEY ACTUALLY CREATE NEW SKILLS, IS OPEN TO CONJECTURE. CHASING SKILLS THROUGH THE DELIVERY OF COURSES ALONE IS FUTILE AND THAT IS WHY THE FOCUS NEEDS TO SHIFT TO PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT, RATHER THAN SKILLS ATTAINMENT.

ARTICLE BY STEVE DINEEN, FOUNDER & CHIEF STORYTELLER - FUSE

"The madness lies in the method, chasing skills through the delivery of courses is fundamentally flawed, because acquiring knowledge at a course does not denote the acquisition of a new skill"

Addressing skills gaps presents something of a revolving door for L&D departments. The target is constantly moving and, as soon as one gap is filled, another one opens. To plug these gaps, learning leaders have typically turned to training courses, but while these certainly have a role to play, they are not aligned with the metrics that matter most, creating active learning habits and behaviours through immediate, frequent and in-context application, for the purpose of improving performance. The L&D rulebook of old needs to be re-written and the focus must switch from measuring skills attainment and course completion rates - meaning learning delivery - to measuring positive learning behaviours, against wider business performance.

Of course, the attainment of skills often does support business performance, nobody is denying that. The madness here lies in the method, chasing skills through the delivery of courses, which is a fundamentally flawed approach, because acquiring knowledge at a course does not denote the acquisition of a new skill, but rather just an understanding of it. The skill "happens" when that understanding is subsequently developed over time, through practice and application. Knowledge only transports the learner to a base level of competency, it is beyond this that they must regularly apply that knowledge in context, to develop and retain the skill. In practice, there are many illustrations of this distance between attainment and application - a pianist who doesn't practice will lose the ability to play and the IT graduate who learns to code in a theoretical world, will not be ready to apply that as a skill in the context of

their work, because they're still only at an entry level. It's a simple concept, yet many L&D departments still wrongly equate course completion with skills development and the result is; heavy spend on L&D, widening skills gaps and a lack of attributable impact on performance improvement.

Key to solving this puzzle is retiring the course-centric model and placing contextual learning experiences, that actively engage people in the flow of work at the heart of a new learning and performance development model. This is where positive learning habits are formed and it makes all the difference in terms of addressing skills gaps and improving business performance. What we do know is that content libraries alone won't achieve this. So, what will? A curious mindset of continual discovery, but that relies upon the right culture, leadership and technology. The objective here is to reinforce the value that employees take from learning, by emphasising its benefit in performance terms. This is best achieved by engaging people with trusted and accessible learning content - in context and in flow - and by delivering digital-led, consumer-like learning experiences. Leaders play a vital role because, if they are actively engaged in learning themselves, their employees are more likely to do the same. It makes sense that if leaders are not only championing, but are actively involved in learning, employees will be more able to understand the value of L&D and seize the opportunities presented. By making engaged learning an integral part of people's working lives, it will become an integral part of company culture.

Measuring skills in isolation is a pointless exercise, because alone, they do not impact performance unless they are applied often and in context - and only then if they help someone to perform better at work. Instead, the emphasis should be on looking at active learning engagement as an indicator of measurable business performance. Put bluntly, by focusing on courses as the path to skill attainment, L&D teams will resign themselves to the revolving door of perpetual skills gaps. There are positive signs of a growing departure from this stance, the majority is still to realise the subtle but significant impact of thinking about performance ahead of skills. Think of it in these terms: would you rather upskill 20 people or see those 20 people performing 50 percent better? By making skills the goal, outcomes will be far more limited than if the goal had been one of performance improvement. ●



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