



FUTURE OF LEARNING

ADVISORY SESSION NOTES: 16 MAY 2022

On Monday 16th May 2022 learning experts from CRF member organisations took part in a wide-ranging discussion to support CRF's upcoming research *The Future of Learning*. Led by Carmen von Rohr, the focus group discussions are summarised here.

WHAT ARE THE BUSINESS DRIVERS FOR EVOLVING YOUR LEARNING STRATEGY?

Attendees reported the following objectives and priorities:

- In a tough market for attracting and retaining talent, learning and development has a critical role to play.
- Blended learning makes it feasible for employees who don't have time or capacity to fit learning alongside their day job in the flow of work.
- Supporting knowledge transfer of older employees to younger generations so expertise is captured and retained.
- Supporting reskilling and upskilling commitments and strategies.
- The need for closer integration between talent management and learning. The introduction of talent marketplaces and learning experience platforms is opening up options for personalised learning solutions and pathways, and connecting learning with on-the-job experiences.
- For some businesses, offering learning in the communities where their employees live is part of the licence to operate.
- A desire to democratise learning and move away from the mindset shift that you're only learning if you attend a 'course'.
- One organisation ran focus groups with the leadership team to identify capabilities that required investment in order to deliver the business strategy.

WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE YOU ADOPTED FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER?

Examples shared included:

- Learning sprints. For five minutes each week, employees are encouraged to pause and go through some reflective questions to help them embed the learnings from a piece of work they are involved in.
- Using subject matter experts to teach others. One organisation reported that employees are more likely to attend a session run by an internal expert than an internal

or external trainer. Internal experts also have the advantage of understanding both the content and the culture within which it's applied, and this is leading to better learning outcomes. For example, a data literacy programme run by internal experts. Externally-run sessions that would normally attract 15 to 20 can attract ten times as many when run as a webinar with an internal expert. Using internal experts is also a way of offering learning at low cost – hiring external experts would make it unaffordable. Another organisation runs Friday lunchtime briefing sessions, tackling business and technology related topics on alternate weeks.

- Attendees noted it's important to prioritise known knowledge gaps and consciously focus efforts in these areas.

VIRTUAL VS. FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

- Over the last two years, the default setting has been to run learning events digitally, and learners are now accepting this.
- Companies are having to balance conflicting priorities. On the one hand, virtual delivery is allowing learning functions to scale their offerings and reach more people. On the other hand, people are craving in-person contact after two years.
- Another tension which has emerged since the pandemic is people say they want an in-person experience but they aren't necessarily prepared to go into the office to get it. Some attendees are also experiencing high levels of 'no shows' for face-to-face events, which is costly for the business. Attendees reported that, although people might express the desire to attend in person, in practice they are less flexible about travelling to attend training than they were pre-pandemic.
- Some companies are getting creative about how they deliver blended learning experiences that combine in-person and virtual learning. For example, one company ran a Growth Week, with a timetable dedicated to learning. 18,000 employees globally signed up to 47 sessions over a week with a mix of internal and external speakers. In some markets, people created their own bespoke learning experiences. In one market people got together to join the global session as a team. They had one of the speakers join them in person before the virtual session, and after the virtual event they ran a live discussion where they discussed how to bring the learning to life for their business unit. Others are designing learning experiences so the 'content' elements of the learning are made available to be consumed digitally pre-event, so that when cohorts come together they can focus on social interaction and applying the content to their business context.
- With regard to leadership development in particular, companies report that while they delivered leadership development virtually during the pandemic, now they are moving back to face to face for some elements. They are



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distinguishing between 'content' – which can be effectively delivered virtually on the whole – and 'networking and relationship building' which requires in-person engagement. Companies are struggling to replicate networking digitally.

- Virtual is seen as more inclusive and flexible, but attendees commented they felt they could do more around building social interaction into digital content.
- Attendees also recognised the particular challenges for early-career employees, for example graduate trainees, who crave social interaction and the opportunity to develop together as a cohort and benefit from in-person onboarding.
- Virtual has also meant changing the length and scheduling of learning sessions. At first companies were running 2-4 hour virtual sessions but now have settled on shorter sessions.
- Some companies are running virtual interaction sessions that complement their digital learning content which individuals generally consume on their own.

STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING LEARNING INTO THE FLOW OF WORK

- One attendee shared details of the digital learning portal developed in their business, which is designed to be a 'Netflix for learning'. There are different channels focused on various learning topics. Each channel contains relevant content such as articles, TED talks etc. Colleagues can access these materials on-the-go if they choose. This organisation is also looking to encourage a culture of learning. One action they have taken is to set objectives for employees around the number of hours of digital learning they are expected to undertake. They are encouraging all employees to complete 16 hours of digital learning annually. The learning experience platform logs learning completed and – like Netflix – makes recommendations based on content previously consumed. Employees can also log learning they have undertaken outside of the portal.

LEARNING CULTURES AND MINDSETS

- The pandemic has been an opportunity to push responsibility for learning on to employees. L&D provides the digital content and tools which individuals can engage with as it suits them.
- However, ownership of learning is a challenge. Often people are happy to consult Google or YouTube to learn a new skill at home, but are more reluctant to do this at work. One solution is to frame learning as a habit rather than a chore. Another is to learn from the entertainment industry and digital marketing – how do we capture people's attention? How do we get people to 'binge watch' learning content?
- Some companies are having to deal with a mindset shift away from learning being seen as a reward – time away from the day job – to being framed as an investment in their future.

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

- The world of learning technology is changing fast these days, with new tools coming onto the market all the time.
- Several attendees have launched or are experimenting with learning experience platforms.
- There was a view that simply having a learning management system is not enough now. Companies need to be investing in an integrated ecosystem of tools. Having a technology-enabled integrated employee experience that brings together learning, career development and deployment to roles and projects is important.
- The different technology platforms are converging on a similar look and feel – there's not much to differentiate between different technology solutions these days. What differentiates solutions is how well they integrate with other systems in use within the organisation. If you want to maximise learning in the flow of work, people need to access learning through the systems they use day-in-day-out. Integration needs to be seamless and that costs money.

TEAM-BASED LEARNING

Attendees discussed the degree to which L&D is prioritising supporting teams – as opposed to individuals – in learning and improving their performance.

- On the one hand some attendees found that virtual working made it easier to bolt team development activities onto existing team conversations, thereby integrating team learning into the flow of work.
- On the other hand, many L&D specialists are not skilled or equipped with the required team diagnostic and team facilitation and development skills. Also, many L&D functions do not have the capacity to keep up with demand. One solution is to develop standard resources and toolkits that can be delivered by HR business partners.

crf UPCOMING EVENT



IN-PERSON AND ONLINE:

[The Future of Learning](#)



10th November, 9.00 GMT, Central London



10th November, 10.00 GMT, Online

Register

