Engendering a Learning Culture: Practical tips from Skillsoft customers who’ve successfully implemented and embedded eLearning into their organisations
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It's an indisputable fact that the most important consideration in any business project is people. They come before any technology, content or process. If your role is training, learning, development or human resources, then the people and cultural elements of your work are critical.

This paper is a practical guide to the cultural considerations of learning and development (L&D) programmes - how to get the people element right. Drawing on the real-world experience of our customers, it explores everything from planning, communication and delivery right through to striking the right balance with your toolkit, driving adoption, ensuring fairness and future-proofing.
ENTERPRISE ELEARNING SUCCESS FACTORS

There are a multitude of reasons why organisations across the globe are adopting eLearning strategies – economies of scale, business agility and continuity, the democratisation of learning access, quality assured and consistent education delivery, talent retention, and so forth.

Yet too many still struggle to adequately exploit the full benefit of eLearning and achieve the business impact, staff motivation and take-up of eLearning that delivers bottom line results.

The hard truth is, you can’t just deliver a learning portal via an intranet – and expect people to get on with it. People, process and technology need to work in cohesion and within a clearly defined rationale that defines and enables your eLearning implementation.

At the very least, you’ll need to dovetail your learning objectives into a wider set of defined enterprise needs – while taking into account the aspirations, expectations and learner contexts of employees.

But that’s not all.

The successful implementation of an engaging and supportive eLearning culture is reliant on a number of ‘must have’ factors:

- **Alignment to needs** – eLearning needs to support the organisational agenda, demonstrating a clear strategic match between eLearning activity and business goals and targets.

- **Marketing** – the key to creating a ‘critical mass’ of users by raising awareness of eLearning and its benefits among top management, line managers and – above all - employees.

- **Management support** – cooperation with key stakeholders is vital. Managers can support and direct employees to find the right time to learn, help align content to business need to increase eLearning effectiveness, and give learning and development (L&D) important insights into the skills their people need.

- **Perceived usefulness and ease of use** – ideally, eLearning should be ‘people-centred’ rather than ‘learning centred’ and it’s critical that employees understand the personal and professional benefits to be gained by engaging with eLearning.
Organisational culture – from helping people understand how to ‘e-learn’, to the design and launch of learning interventions that complement the work environment of your learners, implementing the right blend of learning methods and tools is critical to success.

Motivation to learn – you can employ a carrot/stick approach to encourage take-up, or you can position eLearning as a visible manifestation of your organisation’s desire to encourage learning, career advancement and personal development.

This white paper borrows from the collective expertise of our customers – with practical tips and tricks for engendering positive cultural change and business acceptance of eLearning in the workplace.

1. SCOPING A LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Achieving a strategic match between eLearning activity and business goals and targets is an important first step – and it’s vital that the learning, development and talent teams are involved in both strategic and local tactical decisions relating to implementation and content.

Before jumping in feet first, consider a project team to identify:

- key objectives – what the business is trying to achieve
- quick win programmes – what can be done quickly that will have impact
- the longer term development strategy

Getting eLearning off the ground will depend on building strong links with managers, partnering with them to ensure a) eLearning projects are designed to match business needs, b) programmes are appropriate to the workplace context of learners, and c) that eLearning keeps pace with the constantly evolving body of knowledge learners or the business requires.

Many of our customers confirm the importance of including line managers in the development phase of an eLearning project; these important eLearning ambassadors need to be ‘on-side’ from the get go and can add real value to the definition and design of the learning experience.
You may find it helpful to engage an account manager and/or customer success consultant from your eLearning partner to navigate available resources and define structured development programmes that can be evolved, as business needs change. Acting as an extension of the L&D team, they can help you engage with key stakeholders and exploit the full potential of the resources at your disposal.

It's an approach that worked well for one health informatics customer when they took the decision to define the training requirements for each organisational job role as a precursor to creating training pathways that would give individual staff members access to the appropriate skills development and training they needed to perform. Today these pathways are mapped to staff personal development plans, and every learner's training journey is monitored and recorded in Skillsoft's learning platform, Skillport.

But, as a major retail brand customer explained to us – it's important that an inflexible and prescriptive approach is not enforced on the business; “We no longer impose a curriculum from above – instead, we provide a framework and guideposts to resources and wider skills and competencies that resonate with learners, support specific organisational skills-development objectives, and add real value to the business.”

The support of management and key stakeholders in the self-directed learning environment is crucial.

For some of our customers, maximising the outreach of eLearning begins with an analysis of employee annual appraisals in order to identify the development needs of individuals and generate learning plans.

For others it starts with an increased focus on the effective delivery of statutory and mandatory training – a substantial proportion of which could be delivered via eLearning. Subsequently, training sessions and courses are written specifically to mirror policy, procedure and practice which extends above and beyond regulatory standards and requirements.

In some sectors, the emphasis for customers has been to link their eLearning strategy to other auditable departments to ensure a solid, synchronised and consistent approach. This includes making sure areas like financial management and workforce planning/development are incorporated into their eLearning delivery mechanisms.

Better together

PD&L brings value by providing training experience and expertise, advising and supporting business managers on the most cost effective ways to create training solutions. And while the design and implementation of development programmes is undertaken by PD&L, business experts work alongside the team to share their insights and knowledge while executives and managers are involved early on in the process to help establish the development priorities for their teams.
2. COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Customers who've successfully worked towards a mature eLearning model confirm that a proactive marketing approach with both learners and line managers is essential. Actions they've taken include generating recognition and publicity of early adopters or enthusiasts who've become champions at a local level, and supporting business managers to get the word out.

As one customer explains, “Certainly, the ‘marketing’ of the eLearning package was key. Skillsoft gave us lots of innovative ideas and the benefits of its experience. The most successful way for us to showcase Skillsoft was on open days, which we marketed through emails and posters.”

Others have used the Skillsoft Client Community that has a wealth of resources to support and build marketing campaigns for their learning programmes.

Demonstrating that learning has been successful can be difficult, but Skillsoft’s eLearning technology makes it possible to gather information that can make a small but valuable contribution to the indicators of success. All of which provides a springboard for reporting successes to employees and managers, while highlighting measurable value.

Looking for opportunities to demonstrate quick wins can pay dividends. For example, you may be able to compare customer or employee satisfaction scores before and after a training intervention – using the results to showcase how you’ve reduced time to achieve a proven competency or changed perceptions.

From talking with our customers it’s clear a two-way dialogue is important. For example, many organisations say their Generation Y employees value soft skills below technical know-how. To ensure that upcoming talent is nurtured in line with the real-life needs of customers and to engender enhanced team and collaboration skills, their L&D teams have used employee surveys to uncover the pressing need for soft skills development – and publicised these findings.

Research from the world’s largest chain of hamburger and fast food restaurants, reveals that by 2020, over half a million UK workers will be significantly held back by a lack of soft skills – an issue forecasted to affect all sectors¹. At the same time, soft skills contribute £88 billion to the UK economy today – with this contribution predicted to increase to £109 billion during the next five years.

Show and tell

One of our customers in the healthcare sector communicated the importance of training across its business. Working in partnership with its frontline teams, the company listened to the aspirations of its people – especially when it came to career development. By linking quality assurance, staff supervision and performance reviews with training, the company has ensured its people have the tools they need to access training and complete assigned courses.

¹ http://backingsoftskills.co.uk
For these organisations, linking skills acquisition to an individual's career goals or their on-the-job learning programme has proved effective at encouraging Generation Y employees to embrace soft skills training. And they tell us that delivering ‘bite-sized’ single concept inputs directed at achieving ‘one behaviour change at a time’ has also proved appealing to this cohort of learners.

Others say they've identified that peer recognition is highly valued by Generation Y employees. This finding led one customer to integrate their development solution with an internal collaboration tool so employees can ‘socially’ share their learning experiences using blogs or videos. Employees are encouraged to contribute their viewpoint, together with links to resources they've found inspiring or helpful.

3. MAKE LEARNING FLEXIBLE - AND ALLOCATE TIME TO LEARN

Old style text-based eLearning styles can be uninspiring. Today's ‘connected’ users expect to be able to explore a variety of learning media – videos, e-books, virtual practice labs or interactive courses.

What's more, the ability to access learning at a time and place that's convenient for them – giving them the flexibility to learn whenever they have a spare moment and returning to a course at a later stage to review points, or complete a programme - can go a long way to boosting employee willingness and participation in eLearning.

Today's learners are more likely to embrace eLearning when everything they need is easily accessible – in one place. We've found many of our customers use their eLearning portal to give employees direct access to learning resources that have been clearly categorised against specific jobs and competency frameworks. Plus, they've made it easy for employees to automatically access the search function for Books24x7® directly from the eLearning portal itself.

Skillsoft's digital books solution Books24x7 offers on-demand, instant access to the complete text of thousands of best-in-class online books. Providing a single point of access for all learning content also makes it a ‘no brainer’ for employees looking to access content that's useful in a day-today context, or to explore materials that support a set of courses in the Learning Management System (LMS) itself.

Exposing links to learning to contextual content within the enterprise portal itself is another great way to stimulate learner uptake - deep linking eliminates users having to make 15 clicks to get from system access to content launch, which inevitably puts users off.

What's more, our customers confirm that today's learner expectations are increasingly shaped by their ‘real world’ consumer experiences. It's one of the reasons why they now clearly signpost options that extend the personal learning of employees yet further – making it easier for staff to navigate the varied choice of learning resources that are available and personalising the virtual learning experience. From a learner viewpoint, making access easy and hassle free encourages long term participation.

Anytime, anywhere workplace learning

The launch of a web-based eLearning portal at a bank has allowed our customer in the finance sector to completely innovate and reinvent how, when and where training takes place. Flexible and available 24 x 7, the self-service training model has made employee-empowered ‘anytime, anywhere’ learning and development – backed up with comprehensive progress reporting and achievements tracking.
E-learning is highly effective when it is actively evangelised by managers. Once an employee commits to a course or programme, why not deliver weekly reminders until the task is completed? As users learn new functional skills they can test their understanding with practice scenarios, or perhaps emailing questions to a Skillsoft professional. And if they miss a session you can use Skillsoft to record webinars, creating content that can later be viewed later.

Many of the companies we work with tell us that providing this type of support goes a long way to increasing the perceived ease of use. Plus, when learners know they have access to specific support this prevents negative attitudes and drop-outs.

Finally, customers confirm that when employees find a personal interest or development goal - and have their manager’s support – they’re highly motivated to study over and above any learning scheduled as part of their job role development programme.

4. OFFER A BLENDED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Incorporating e-learning with other more traditional learning formats has been identified by several of our customers as a significant strategy for learning success within their organisation. They confirm it is important that e-learning is not seen as a discrete and separate delivery mode but part of a blended spectrum that’s strategically embedded into the full range of learning, education and information services on offer.

Utilising a blended approach to learning ensures staff has access to development tools that suits their needs, and acknowledges that e-learning is not a ‘magic bullet’ that suits every learner or learning style. A blend of classroom-based learning, and ‘on the job’ mentoring and coaching supported by a catalogue of clearly defined e-learning resources makes it possible to offer engaging, personalised, flexible learning experiences that meet a wide range of learning styles, preferences and abilities.

Blended learning captures the best of both worlds, allowing learners to pick and choose how they want to learn and affords them greater flexibility and convenience about when they learn. More and more companies are successfully integrating classroom training with e-learning, mentoring support, simulations, online reference material and virtual tools in order to support informal, on-the-job training.

What’s more, research has shown that unless the knowledge obtained during a course is put into practice very quickly after it’s been delivered, the vast majority of that knowledge can be lost. Today’s enterprises are looking to implement the same 70/20/10 framework of learning used by many of the organisations mentioned where; 70 percent of what you learn is informal, on the job, experienced-based; 20 percent is from coaching, mentoring and collaboration, and just 10 percent is implemented through formal learning.

2 The 70:20:10 concept centres around the idea that the majority (or around 70%) of learning comes through experience, around 20% comes from social learning with colleagues and just 10% through formal learning such as classroom training or online courses. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/70/20/10_Model
Utilising an eLearning strategy to reinforce this knowledge and skills acquisition can significantly maximise the return on investment (ROI) of any training investment – while encouraging and supporting staff to pursue self-directed learning and development that extends their job related skills and capabilities.

5. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

For many organisations, the implementation of learning technology platforms delivers tangible and measurable results. eLearning is easily accessible and readily available for all staff, irrespective of their role, location or hours of working.

Indeed, evidence suggests there is no significant difference in learning outcomes between classroom based and virtual learning – and there is increasing evidence that well-structured eLearning, accompanied by integral knowledge assessment, leads to improved retention of key learning points.

Providing a flexible method of education and training delivery which is standardised and consistent widens access to training, and helps support the development of staff in reaching their potential. Organisations confirm that they are giving all employees access to the same development opportunities, and an opportunity to explore the widest possible diversity of subjects.

For some companies, eLearning solutions such as those offered by Skillsoft are proving a valuable induction tool for new starters. Ensuring they are fully informed of training that’s available to support them in their role and initiating a lifelong self-directed learning habit that allows them to determine their own future career development.

What’s more, today’s eLearning platforms and content can deliver material in a variety of languages. Making it possible to initiate global development programmes that give all employees access to the same resources, ensuring all colleagues in different countries can enjoy access to the same quality learning and development materials and opportunities.

For other sectors, including healthcare and leisure and hospitality, an eLearning strategy is proving the ideal solution to delivering learning inclusivity for staff that regularly work night shifts or only at weekends.

For others, it’s proved a great way to reduce employee exposure, for example giving employees who have been recently promoted the fast-tracked skills acquisition they’ll need to handle new responsibilities or to plug skill set gaps. In other scenarios they’ve created tactical learning programmes to up-skill or re-skill employees so they can respond fast to key technology shifts or are fully conversant with compliance requirements in fast moving or new markets.
6. STIMULATING ADOPTION – THE BIG IDEAS

E-learning programmes need to be introduced to employees in a way that’s supportive and projects a relaxed and informal approach to training. Making learning accessible is the key, as is the delivery of flexible learning interventions that take account of the work situation of learners and the opportunities they have to learn. It’s a great way to boost staff motivation, extend the take-up of e-learning throughout the enterprise and manage talent within the organisation.

Many customers are using initiatives like the Skillsoft New Habit Calendar\(^3\) to incentivise people to extend their knowledge and venture into subject areas they may not have previously explored. Each day, employees are encouraged to visit the calendar to access a new piece of bite-sized learning that’s aligned to key organisational learning milestones. The approach quickly embeds a hunger for new knowledge and an aptitude to take on new skills as part and parcel of the workplace contract.

Here are just some of the big ideas our customers have pioneered to engender a learning culture within their enterprises.

- One customer utilised the Skillsoft Five@5.00™ programme to drive a cultural shift from manager-led training to a more self-directed approach. Developed to improve employee knowledge of specific subject areas, the programme asks participants to take five minutes at the close of the business day to connect to a simple behavioural change technique which enables leaders or individuals to develop through learning and reflection.

- Another customer kicked off a programme of ‘Lunch & Learn’ sessions for employees who feel they don’t have time to learn during work hours. The project, which includes lunch, brings digital learning to employees in an informal and relaxed setting and stimulates the exploration of highly engaging themes such as ‘Cultures of Engagement and Building Winning Teams’ and ‘Karaoke Capitalism: Reenergising the Corporation’ through the use of video, slides and debate.

- To maximise the delivery of soft skills training to Generation Y employees, one customer kicked off a new initiative that provides a different five-minute learning nugget for each working day of the week. The 21-day programme is themed around a different topic each month and delivered via Skillsoft’s New Habit Calendar tool, which Skillsoft’s Customer Success Consultant helps to populate with materials and content. Take-up among employees has been high, with many accessing learning on their commute to and from work.

\(^3\) http://www.newhabitcalendar.com/
To enhance the leadership skills of managers and underpin a strong corporate focus on contemporary workplace health, one customer initiated a ‘Wellbeing @ work’ programme, using eLearning modules to prepare learners for courses, stimulate employee awareness of life skills that contribute to wellness and to facilitate the coaching of managers on how to support their teams.

This customer also promotes optional learning and development opportunities to staff through a monthly L&D magazine that's delivered directly to employee inboxes. Containing rich video content and links to useful texts, employees can store the email and refer to it for bitesized chunks of training on topics that resonate with them or their role.

Other customers have positioned eLearning as a powerful support tool that can help to nurture people's personal development goals or help get their skills development moving by connecting them to resources and others who are on similar learning journeys.

Here’s a selection of their big ideas for boosting employee satisfaction with eLearning programmes that reinforce skills acquisition.

- One organisation took the decision to offer accredited learning through its learning centre so its people could gain qualifications they may have missed out on in school. As they put it; “We see it as a win-win situation – employees get the chance to obtain qualifications without time out from work, while we gain an opportunity to increase the skill set of our workforce”. Uptake of the voluntary scheme has spread through word of mouth and social networking; as soon as one employee completes a course, others are tempted to venture into the learning centre to check out what's on offer.

- Study groups are proving a highly popular way for organisations to support people as they embark on their learning journey. Skillsoft Live Learning™ brings the benefits of virtual instructor led training for key technical certification topics to the desktop, providing a highly integrated blended learning experience that includes live classes, laboratory simulations and practice exams.

- Others reinforce their eLearning curriculum with 'drop in' sessions that give learners an opportunity to review aspects of their learning programme and talk through anything they may not fully understand.

- One customer has designed knowledge-sharing and collaboration zones as part of their Technical Academy programme. An annual recertification system has also been developed so that people can demonstrate how they’re keeping the skills fresh and up-to-date following their initial accreditation.
7. FUTURE - PROOF YOUR ELEARNING INVESTMENT

Even after having done all that initial hard work to identify workforce development needs, gain management buy-in, and kick-start programmes that get learning in front of users - in a format that takes account of their learning preferences - you'll also need to ensure the momentum continues.

To achieve this you'll need to put in place processes to ensure your eLearning strategy constantly reinforces knowledge acquisition that's relevant and appropriate 'right now' to the enterprise. That will include regular reviews and consultations with business leads – and even learners - to make sure your business learning programme is a living, breathing document that reflects the ongoing needs, trends and business requirements.

Building in regular 'review and learn' breathing points can help you assess the year's accomplishments and reflect on lessons learned. In this way you can build on existing success and identify when, why and how you can utilise further training to meet and exceed business growth objectives.

As part of this process, you'll need to ensure you have an eLearning platform in place that scales to meet demands, supports a wide range of delivery models, and enables you to add new features – like social networking or mobile – to extend outreach and support the streamlined delivery of learning opportunities to employees, wherever they are and however they choose to engage with resources.
**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Done well, eLearning offers a win-win situation for the enterprise and its employees. Getting it right begins with careful planning to establish clear goals of what you want to achieve and delivery from the outset. You’ll also need to agree ROI measures to track and evaluate the impact of eLearning on the growth of individuals and the organisation itself.

Remember, you need to ensure that eLearning remains flexible and responsive to the ever-changing circumstances of the business. And that each element forms part of a broader strategy and learning context that complements other key learning tools your organisation utilises.

Ensuring your platform is flexible enough to cope with any eventuality will be critical to long term success. And you should make sure your eLearning partner offers ongoing support and guidance that includes best-practice approaches to maximise the impact of your eLearning investment.

At Skillsoft we're advocates of sharing great ideas and hope that some of these real-world tips resonate as you evolve a maturing eLearning model. It may trigger a big idea that's appropriate for your organisation's unique aspirations or workplace learning vision.
ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft is the global leader in eLearning with a long history of innovation. We train more professionals than any other company in the world and are trusted by the world’s leading organisations, including over 50% of the Fortune 500.

We currently serve over 6,700 customers and more than 45,000,000 learners worldwide and provide continuing, hands-on support to assist them in maximising their ongoing success.

Skillsoft has grown rapidly, with 2,500 employees across multiple locations in North America, EMEA and APAC. For more information, visit www.skillsoft.com.