

Digital Learning Transformation for Remote employee engagement, performance, and retention

Across the UK tech space, few large organisations wanted to or have been able to continue with face-to-face onboarding and training during, or “since”, the pandemic. While most will have had a level of elearning already in place for the basics of company processes and compliance training, many then took the same principles to further L&D content moving forward for remote employees.

However, it’s crucial to view this solution as an extension of existing box-ticking exercises required for health and safety or other compliance training that short-changes employees and the business as a whole.

So you want to hire and retain millennials?

LinkedIn's 2018 Workplace Learning Report found that 69% of non-millennials see development as important in a job, while this figure rises to 87% for millennials. This means that the competitive advantage to be gained from enhancing learning and development opportunities will increase in its importance for engaging remote employees over the coming years.

According to *research by Oxford Economics and Unum*, the cost of replacing an employee earning £25,000 is over £30,000 on average when you factor in all costs, and this may not even account for the associated inefficiencies caused by disruption and loss of knowledge and experience.

Digital learning transformation aims to make elearning possible but also how to make training as effective, engaging and enjoyable as possible.

As 94% of employees would stay longer if they felt their company was investing in their career, making learning materials not only accessible but engaging and personalised could bring vast improvements in morale and reduce attrition.

Startups for the win

Investment in such digital learning solutions could be repaid many times over across an organisation from just the reduced recruitment costs alone. Inspiration for UK companies to enhance their digital transformation and digital learning solutions can be found by appraising the strengths of the empowered, nimble startup scene. These young companies often make great use of limited resources but use them wisely, unburdened by the many levels and gears they adopt the latest tech available, providing the insights into what works and what doesn't.

Looked at another way, digital learning transformation is not only the technology helping UK companies tend-to and train their employees, but it is a space for evolution that is a process of learning in and of itself. Unsurprisingly, it all takes root and begins at the top.

Transformation Buy-In at Leadership Level

For digital learning transformation to have a real impact across the organisation, L&D managers need to first ensure buy-in from their fellow leaders, starting from the top:

CEO. The big boss loves speed – in decision making, in implementation, and in bottom-line results. Demonstrate how digital learning will enable new products and services to be rolled out faster, as training can be created and delivered quickly, even across borders, and updated with minimal time and fuss down the line.

Head of Finance. A key consideration for finance is minimising and cutting costs where possible of course. Sell the idea of digital learning to this team on the basis that it reduces costs in the way of face to face trainers, room hire, travel and materials. Rather than an investment (a cost), it is a cost-saving device for which you may be able to demonstrate a clear business case and ROI.

Head of IT. The techies love control. Rather than selling the Head of IT on the concept of digital learning, you may find that he or she is enthusiastic but wants to be actively involved to ensure integration with existing systems. See this as a collaboration where you may need to hand over a level of control.

Legal. A well set up learning platform is a powerful asset for legal/regulatory compliance. It provides clear information on required training and can provide alerts when refresher training is required. An easy sell to an in-house or external legal team.

HR. Recruitment, onboarding, training, morale and retention are all key considerations for the Head of HR. L&D and HR are closely aligned anyway – if not part of the same People department. Digital Learning Transformation does require a great deal of data sharing and integration with HR systems, but done well, HR and L&D will have a seamless, beautiful relationship for ever after.

Key Steps to Digital Learning Transformation

A digital learning transformation programme requires careful planning, implementation, assessment and improvement. And technology implementation such as this can be broken down into distinct steps for success: Plan, Consult, Implement, Test, Measure & Analyse and Improve.

Plan

You will have done a level of planning in order to win the support of department heads. In order to maintain that support, you'll need to carefully scope and cost the technologies you're looking to introduce and the human resources needed for their implementation.

What existing processes will be retired and what are the direct replacements for each one in the new digital learning environment?

As so many technology projects stray beyond expected timescales, give yourself plenty of buffer time so that you don't miss deadlines and start losing support from your peers.

Consult

Communication is vital for a successful digital learning transformation programme. Many IT projects fail not through a poor choice of technology, but through lack of communication beforehand in order to generate understanding and buy-in from end-users.

At the consultation stage, learn about what the key pain-points are within each department and try to tailor your digital learning solutions to help ease them.

Help each department to understand the benefits of digital learning transformation for their roles and you'll find less friction and greater user adoption of new systems and processes post-implementation.

Implement

Don't try to implement every project within the digital transformation programme in one spectacular hit. There will be disruption – good and bad – so limit the bad and overall shock to the organisation by rolling out to a limited cohort – perhaps the department where you have greatest buy-in first.

Introduce new tech and eLearning content gradually, replacing previous training methods bit by bit. Look for what systems and content people are finding confusing and what really enthruses them.

Test & Measure

As your early-stage digital learning projects bed in, analyse the data that comes back from your learning platform. What are the key metrics you are looking to improve and how does the new solution fare compared to previous methods?

Analyse & improve

Again, communication is essential for remote employees and to making your digital learning programme maintain its early momentum. You're gathering quantitative data, but don't ignore qualitative feedback from each group of learners and their managers.

*What has been annoying? What hasn't worked?
What could be improved?*

Within each individual roll-out project, mistakes will be made – that's normal. Those mistakes will be forgiven if you listen to the feedback, take notes, and act as quickly as possible to address them with tweaks to your roll-out.

Transform the Culture

There is only some much you can do in leading a digital learning transformation programme for remote employees before it could feel less collaborative and more like another top-down demand. Who has engaged most with both the process and the benefits from the early stage implementations?

Laser in on these people and try to empower them as advocates of the new solutions – even coaches for their peers who could use support.

With an army of internal activists, user adoption can start to spread like wildfire, making your digital learning take hold and really transform the culture of your organisation.

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