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Workbook

How to Overcome Learning Obstacles in the Workplace

5 strategies to make learning
core to the way we work

Training and developing employees is paramount for organizations today.

Skills are <u>quickly outdated</u> and the cost of hiring or replacing people can be <u>six times more</u> than the cost of training current employees.

Unfortunately, getting a workforce to prioritize learning is easier said than done. According to Udemy's 2021 Workplace Learning Trends Report, <u>61% of respondents</u> said "lack of time" was a top obstacle for learning and development. Other hurdles included budget constraints and proving ROI.

No matter the barrier standing in your way, building a learning culture at your organization is within reach with these five proven strategies.

In this interactive workbook, you'll learn how to integrate learning into the workplace. You'll discover how to push past common internal learning obstacles and create a learning action plan.

1 Develop and foster agile learners

For learners, <u>learning agility</u> means having the ability to figure things out when confronted with an unfamiliar situation or problem. For companies, learning agility means operating in a way that empowers employees to access learning resources in the flow of work or as needed. It also involves letting employees engage with learning when, where, and how they prefer.

Identify learning opportunities

Encourage learners to regularly reflect on three questions to assess their learning needs and opportunities:

> What have I learned before?
>
> What did I learn today?
>
> What do I need to learn next?

The questions — *What have I learned before?, What did I learn today?, and What do I need to learn next?* — bring a level of discipline to our thinking around learning that allows us to reflect on and internalize what's happening. We want to connect the knowledge and expertise employees gained previously to the work they're engaged in now or are about to embark on. Get them thinking about past projects that are relatable to future business needs and how prior experiences can inform current work to make it better.

Ensure learning is accessible to all employees

Learning can't be an interruption that takes employees away from their work for chunks of time. It must be woven into people's daily routine to help them perform their jobs. Companies that treat learning as a strategic asset understand this and make just-in-time learning resources (think: online learning portals, lunch n' learns, book clubs) easily available so people can pick up skills in the moment of need, apply what they've learned right away, and keep moving forward.

Give people time and space to learn

To foster learning agility, you need to give people time and space to learn. For example, you can designate a time when everyone in the company stops whatever they're doing to learn for an hour. Making this a company-wide event signals to all employees that they're encouraged to take time out of their day to focus on learning.

Exercise

Reflect on the learnings in this section. Which tips would propel a learning culture in your company? Jot them down in the space provided.

Actions I plan to take with my team to develop agile learners:

2 Feedback is fuel for learning cultures

Feedback often has negative and harsh connotations. This is why we need to reframe feedback as fuel for individuals and the organization.

Healthy, constructive feedback is not only the foundation of a thriving learning culture, it's necessary to achieve your desired learning outcomes. The path to career development and resiliency is paved with feedback cycles. Companies must teach employees how to give and receive constructive feedback with a growth mindset that creates a safe environment for all.

How to promote a feedback-driven culture

Educate employees on proper ways of giving and receiving feedback.

Encourage regular feedback cycles rooted in growth and future performance.

Ask for feedback on all projects and processes through anonymous surveys.

Normalize feedback so that employees expect and appreciate it.

How to transform feedback across your organization

Feedback is the foundation for understanding your own learning needs and helping your team identify areas for learning and growth.

Everyone needs both space to reflect on their own growth and safety to ask for feedback from others. As executive coach Marshall Goldsmith says, "What got you here won't get you there." That's because the work landscape is always changing. Wherever you hope to go next, you'll need to be intimately familiar with your strengths and areas for improvement. Together, these strengths and weaknesses are the engine that will take you from here to there.

Engines need fuel to operate. What's tricky is creating the conditions in your workplace that will make feedback loops take root so that people don't fear or dismiss feedback but, instead ask for and apply feedback constantly.

For too many of us, feedback has purely negative connotations of harsh criticism and a focus on past performance. In general, the most impactful feedback is:

Constructive: Honest, tough messages keep the recipient's best interests at heart but are geared toward improvement

Perceptive: Insights let recipients see themselves in a different way and have real direction about where they should be learning and growing

Actionable: Feedback should be connected to specific behavior and attached to actionable advice

Holistic: The most valuable feedback is not only applicable to the recipient's professional development but also to their personal life

There's no way around it: When it comes to good feedback, people must get away from being "too nice" or afraid of hurting others feelings. They also have to commit to sharing constructive feedback if they truly care about helping someone improve. And they need to receive feedback with gratitude for the person who cared enough to tell them something difficult.

Exercise

Reflect on the learnings in this section. What are tangible ways to promote the idea that feedback is fuel in your company? Jot your ideas down in the space provided.

Ways I plan to encourage a feedback culture through my team and company:

3 Think like a marketer to make learning more engaging

Just as consumers need a reason to pay attention to your marketing, employees need a reason to pay attention to your learning programs. This is especially true in times of change or stress when learning may fall to the bottom of the priority list.

That's why you need to think like a marketer to motivate employees to embrace continuous learning. Marketers are constantly trying to reach and influence busy consumers who are already distracted by competing priorities. With a little creativity, they must find new ways to cut through the noise to engage a prospective customer — just like learning leaders must cut through the routines of everyday work priorities to train and engage with employees.

How to think like a marketer

Drive learning with techniques borrowed from the marketing world using our creativity framework: Consume, Flip, Incubate, Connect, and Follow.

Consume relevant content online, on TV, and in movies, podcasts, and articles. You never know what may spark an idea for a learning program.

Flip the script and ask what your learners are experiencing and might want to learn. Take a hard, honest look at the status quo and identify what's not working as well as it could be.

Incubate ideas by giving them time to percolate. Give yourself permission to step back, do something else, then return to your work with fresh eyes.

Connect the dots between trends and the content you're consuming. However, don't try to force a connection where there isn't one to be made.

Follow leaders, influencers, teachers, and anyone else who may be a source of inspiration. Follow also stands for following up on your ideas to get feedback and measure success.

How to innovate like a marketer

Learning at work gets a bad rap. Many training programs people have experienced at work are out-of-date, too long and boring, or compliance-oriented. Learners are busy people with deadlines and goals that usually feel more urgent than upskilling. And workers are currently experiencing additional stress and distractions as they adapt to a new normal.

Want to move learning up on your employees' to-do lists? It all starts with bringing more creativity into the mix.

Creativity is a skill, not an art. That means you can learn it and keep getting better at it if you practice. It's all about making connections between things and ideas and your business objectives. You just have to keep asking and challenging yourself, "How do I come up with something new?" It's not divine inspiration; it's a learned behavior.

Exercise

Reflect on the learnings in this section. What are some creative ways you can encourage employees to learn? Jot your ideas down in the space provided.

Creative ways I can drive learning in my company:

4 Put learning into the flow of work (even remotely)

The best way to get people to participate in your learning programs is to make them easy to access and fit them seamlessly into the rest of their activities. Learners need time and space to learn, access to the right learning environment and resources, and leadership that supports their learning needs. This is all still possible in a remote work environment.

How to integrate learning at the workplace

Healthy learning cultures can't happen without putting learning into the flow of work. Here are some ways to incorporate learning into the flow of work:

> Ask employees to create learning goals.
>
> Provide access to online learning platforms and other learning experiences.
>
> Provide a learning stipend.
>
> Set aside dedicated time for learning.
>
> Create the right environment for learning.

How to make learning at work stick

First, make sure that the leaders and policies of your organization support the importance of learning. In times of change, learning is more important than ever. But due to added stress and distractions, many employees have likely moved learning to the bottom of their priority list.

You can combat this by having leaders visibly set aside their own time for learning by joining workshops and sharing what they're learning with their teams and the broader organization. This makes it clear to your employees that learning at work is not only accepted, it's encouraged.

Employees should be empowered to own their learning experiences and have autonomy over what to learn and when. To make it easier for employees to do this, consider recording important group meetings and virtual instructor-led trainings and uploading them as an online course to a central learning platform like Udemy Business.

Many companies also provide learning budgets for employees to attend conferences or in-person workshops. While travel may not be as accessible right now, you can encourage people to use this budget for new purposes, such as buying books, attending virtual conferences, or participating in virtual instructor-led workshops.

Exercise

Reflect on the learnings in this section. How can you make learning a seamless part of your employees' day? Jot your ideas down in the space provided.

Actions I can take to put learning in the flow of work for my teams:

5 Signal the value of learning

As a leader, you can incorporate learning into everything you do, from the way you run your team meetings to how you <u>coach your employees</u> and how you talk about your own career experiences.

Signals from leadership are the most powerful mechanism for spreading a culture of learning. Whether they're explicit or implicit, they send positive messages to the team about learning agility and growth opportunities.

How leaders can motivate learning at work

There are many ways leaders can demonstrate the value of learning in everyday activities. Here are just a few ideas:

Bring it to the team: Ask leaders to offer time in team meetings to discuss recent learnings and challenges. As leaders get candid, it allows employees to share their own light-bulb moments and struggles.

Wrap in career goals: Encourage employees to weave learning opportunities into their career development goals. During performance conversations, managers can offer learning suggestions that will help employees navigate their career paths.

Share mistakes: Acknowledging what didn't go right in a project (without assigning blame) makes space for vulnerability in the workplace and allows employees of all levels to bring their authentic selves to work.

Reflect on results and celebrate successes: Don't just finish a project and move onto the next. Hold post-mortems and retrospectives on projects.

Award and recognize learners: Gamify the learning experience with company-wide games. Or, recognize employees going beyond their learning goals with shout-outs during all-hands meetings.

How to cultivate the next generation of leaders

Studies show that if employees are not able to talk about their career development with their managers, they are more likely to leave. Plus, your employees will greatly benefit from the career insight you can provide to them as a leader.

Share your observations of their talents, coach them to think through their peak career experiences, and connect them with opportunities to try new things and learn more in areas they're looking to grow in.

Make it safe to fail. Remove the stigma and confront failure head-on by talking about it and using it as another part of the learning journey. To signal that learning is a priority, the best leaders don't stop at taking courses or finding coaches. They are open to talking about their own failures, learning experiences, growth challenges, and personal goals. Leaders model the behavior they want to see in their teams.

Exercise

Reflect on the learnings in this section. What actions can your company's leaders take to highlight the importance of learning? Jot your ideas down in the space provided.

How I can signal the value of learning in everyday scenarios:

Create an action plan to overcome learning obstacles

Creating a learning culture is not a one-time event. It requires continuous upkeep and improvement to thrive. Use your responses to the exercises in each section of this workbook to build an action plan to support and grow a learning culture in your organization.

As we've covered in this workbook, learning obstacles are bound to crop up. This happens even in the best of times, not to mention when there are major external factors at play. But taking the time to think about the small and big ways you'll overcome those challenges can help set you up for success.

Looking for a little extra support? **Speak with Udemy Business learning experts** about how to grow your company's learning culture.

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