

Upskilling. Who's In Charge?



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Organisations are increasingly shifting away from the push-based model of learning which constitutes mandated training programmes for employees to attend, towards pull learning where employees get to choose their training and development needs at their own pace.

Instead of dictating when and what their employees are learning, companies are giving their employees the autonomy to chart their own upskilling path. But can employees be entrusted to do so?

The reality is that not all employees might feel personally motivated towards self-development. Whilst with push learning, employers are able to ensure their workers are trained or certified in certain key areas for growth in an organisation, pull-based learning may result in some workers falling through the cracks.

While, one option may be to make it compulsory for workers to complete certain courses within a specified time-frame, it does not lend well towards nurturing a self-driven and agile workforce that is able to respond quickly to the ever-changing demands of today's fast-disrupting marketplace.

Disrupting the Traditional Approach

Indeed, the pull-based learning model does have its own distinct advantages. For a start, it is much closer aligned with our on-demand culture, in which people expect to be able to access information instantaneously. This is well-demonstrated through the popularity of instructional videos and online courses.

Pull-based learning also allows for employees to customise their learning and upgrading journey to fill specific knowledge gaps that they feel will help them develop in their area of work.

Instead of being 'forced' to learn new things which may not have immediate relevance to them, they are able to pull this new knowledge at the time of need, ensuring the information is up-to-date and fresh in their minds.

More importantly, employers who are on board with pull-based learning represent a healthy and progressive workforce, motivated towards self-improvement. Such a model encourages workers to be more directed in their learning, and allows them to be able to better prioritise and plan their time around work and learning, as well as family and personal commitments.

The popularity of such a model can be seen in the number of companies who have incorporated pull-based learning into their HR strategy. In Singapore, the government has encouraged this model by coming up with a LEARN app, which features online courses by local institutes of higher learning for civil servants to upskill and reskill at their own time and pace.

Creating a Learning Culture

The push-based learning model, however, continues to be important in highly regulated industries where certification is required for certain tasks to be carried out, or in companies which do not have a strong self-directed learning culture.

For the latter, it is important to note that it is the responsibility of the organisation to define their company's cultural expectations with regards to upskilling. Once these expectations have been firmly communicated, and a culture has been established, it will be much easier for pull-based learning to take place.

Just because push-based learning is directed from the top doesn't mean that it can't be made more relevant for employees. With a development plan in place, employees can discuss their learning and development needs and chart their own path towards personal growth.

Breaking down curriculums into smaller chunks to allow employees to mix and match their learning according to their individual needs, and gathering regular feedback from attendees and stakeholders to ensure relevancy of training programmes are also effective means to create a learning culture. Some of the winning attributes of pull-based learning, such as its relevancy, feedback and goal-oriented nature are things that can be incorporated into push-based learning.

Creating a positive environment at work is also important to keep employees motivated. They are more likely to dedicate themselves to learning and development in such an environment.

Ultimately, while there is no one-size-fits all strategy, what makes workers motivated towards upgrading themselves is more than just about pull or push learning. Rather, it's about having a real sense of meaning and purpose in their job, and desiring to have the capabilities to enhance their skills to make a strong impact in their places of employment. Is that something you have in your organisation?