

Educational Revolution: Getting HR to Think Outside the Box

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Just as IT brings in new tools and facilities creates different types of office spaces, HR must usher in new educational techniques to support the modern, collaborative workforce.



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Organizations are always trying to find ways to get more productivity and efficiencies from their employees, a persistent desire that has given rise over the last several years to two workplace trends: 1) the widespread deployment of collaboration technology aimed at making it easier for employees to work together, and 2) creation of office layouts designed to allow people to interact more and get their creative juices flowing. Hipster technology companies aren't the only ones that have been redesigning and redefining workspaces — and certainly with the post-pandemic return to work, we'll see even more attention paid here.

At the same time, digital transformation has disrupted traditional factory-style corporate education that focuses on rote repetitive tasks. In the past, corporate education tended to be bland and fixated on memorization of content and compliance. Today with knowledge management, the Internet and intranet, along with great search engines, forcing employees to memorize data or procedures isn't necessary. Since the access to information today is real-time, what companies need from employees is their ability to be creative, learn quickly, assist others in learning through collaboration, and yes, think outside the box.

Today's employees need continuous learning — as a long-time educator myself, at both the high school and corporate level, I know how vital this is. After all, we all are students and, now more than ever in history, we all are students all the time.

With the understanding that effective corporate educational programs and engaged faculty are foundational in enabling workspace changes or collaboration tools to bear fruit, HR and other leaders are beginning to redefine corporate education. Creative and adaptive corporate education is fundamental for an organization's success or failure, they're finding.

For example, it's been shown that classroom-style, instructor-led courses that last for days often don't provide relevant, long-lasting learning or skills that stick. Today where information, procedures, and policies may change rapidly, microburst learning can have a more positive impact.

Topically focused microburst courses typically run from about 30 minutes to a few hours. Furthermore, during these sessions and even afterwards, peer learning is encouraged. With peer learning, everyone participates and is held accountable for an aspect of the instruction, thereby reinforcing the information; by teaching or facilitating an item of the material, the information becomes more ingrained.

Below are just three of the many elements of the educational revolution.

1) Organizations are becoming cognizant of the different types of learning styles and are adapting their curriculums to meet these styles. Whether you're in the camp that recognizes three styles of learning or the one that believes there are eight styles, you realize that people are different and they learn best when they can ingest information in their own way. Here are some examples:

- Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic
- VARK: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Read/Write
- Thinking – Feeling, Doing – Watching Spectrums
- Visual (Spatial), Auditory (Musical), Verbal (Linguistic), Kinesthetic (Physical), Logical (Mathematical), Social (Interpersonal), Solitary (Intrapersonal)

Many people will have a mixture of a couple styles, so ensuring a variety of educational options is the hallmark of good corporate education.

2) With the advent of new presentation and collaboration applications, the educational delivery methods have grown. HR is varying the methods of instruction provided to employees, including in-class instructor led, virtual yet live instructor led, recorded sessions of instructor led, computer-based training, virtual simulation learning, community learning, and more. Corporations are taking advantage of organizations like LinkedIn Learning and Khan University to supplement their corporate curriculum.

3) Instructor roles are changing; the role is less about imparting knowledge and more about facilitating, coaching, and mentoring. As mentioned, with so much information at everyone's fingertips, the instructor:

- Assists corporate learners in filtering and selecting the information that is appropriate for the situation

- Provides guidelines or ground rules, and is available to assist when necessary
- Steps back to allow for an individual or the group to discuss, discover, and learn
- Serves as a mentor, working to change the “once and done” learning mindset; technology, procedures, and information are always changing, and employees must strive for continuous learning and growth

Though this is but a short list of elements comprising the educational revolution, the items demonstrate that there is a lot going on and much for HR to keep informed about and implement. As businesses seek to build collaborative cultures with the help of modern workforce tools and office design, they must also think about how HR might change corporate education to better serve this need, too. HR must usher in educational changes for the other two to have substantial impact.

In this ever-changing world, instructors need to teach students how to learn, adapt to change, and keep learning. As futurist Alvin Toffler wrote in the 1970 book, “Future Shock”: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

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Cheryl Helm

Cheryl is a sought-after speaker, educator, and consultant in contact center operations and technology. Helm Communications, Inc. consultancy practice specializes in assisting clients in defining their contact center technology roadmap, preparing RFPs / RFQs, vendor selection and often participating in the implementation. Another focus of the practice is creating customer contact routing designs that meet the needs of both the customer and business, while ensuring the design provides accurate statistics and reporting for moving the organization forward. Those who recommend Cheryl say she is “passionate” about seeing her clients succeed.

Cheryl has worked with organizations all over Europe, Australia, Japan, Caribbean, U.S. and Canada and with a broad range of businesses - insurance, health care, travel, hospitality, automobile associations, software companies, helpdesks, manufacturers, telecommunications, utilities, along with governmental agencies.

To develop a well-rounded and in-depth perspective of contact centers, Cheryl also teamed up with ICMI (International Customer Management Institute), and since 1997 has been instructing contact center operational courses, web seminars, and speaking at conferences for ICMI. She has been involved in various components of contact centers – technology, operations, and education – for over 27 years.