



3 ways to create a collaborative workplace

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Millennials have become the largest segment of today's workforce, and they are bringing with them expectations that may cause a shift in the workplace. One of these shifts is the increased desire for social learning. In fact, 89 percent of millennials think it's important to perpetually learn in the workplace, prompting many companies to find new ways to expand personal knowledge within their work environments.¹

Social learning is a framework that allows employees to learn from each other's expertise through knowledge sharing and observational learning. This is especially popular with millennials because they believe it enables them to be more effective at their job, contributes to their evolving skillset and makes them genuinely happy.² The benefits of social learning have led 85 percent of companies to at least experiment with collaborative learning.³ Here are three ways to incorporate social learning in your workplace to create a truly collaborative work environment.

Provide an online tool for sharing knowledge based on learner needs

Technology is an integral part of today's world, and it's important for companies to keep pace by using technology as a platform for learning opportunities that replicate how employees want to learn and interact at work. Although we live in a world where 71 percent of millennials use social media daily,⁴ online learning is not as simple as launching a discussion medium. In fact, organizations that currently engage in online social learning mistakenly focus on discussion and communication. According to a SABA study, 59.5 percent of organizations are using discussion forums, 57.9 percent are using internal blogs and 54.9 percent are using secure instant messaging.⁵ That same study also found that of the two-thirds of organizations using social learning tools, half of them mention challenges with employee adoption.⁵ It's important for companies to ensure the tools are designed with employees in mind. Business decision-makers can do this by asking employees what tools and information they need and providing appropriate seed content to start the conversation. Receiving feedback from employees on what does and doesn't work will allow companies to direct their resources effectively.

¹ ELearning Infographics. Engaging Millennials Using Social Learning, <http://elearninginfographics.com/engaging-millennials-using-social-learning-infographic/> - accessed on Oct. 11, 2016

² Future Learn. The Future of Learning in the Workplace, https://ugc.futurelearn.com/other_assets/workplace-learning/the-future-of-learning-in-the-workplace.pdf - accessed on Oct. 11, 2016

³ Brandon Hall Group. We are in the Age of Social Learning, <http://www.brandonhall.com/blogs/we-are-in-the-age-of-social-learning/> - accessed on Oct. 11, 2016

⁴ Entrepreneur. Millennials Spend 18 Hours a Day Consuming Media -- And It's Mostly Content Created By Peers, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/232062> - accessed on Oct. 12, 2016

⁵ SABA. New Study: Two-Thirds of Companies are Using Social Learning Technology, <https://www.saba.com/us/press-releases/go/2013/new-study-two-thirds-of-companies-are-using-social-learning-technology/> - accessed on Oct. 11, 2016

Create a collaborative culture beyond online tools

One main challenge with online social learning is that it can take time to build traction and employee engagement. To increase employee involvement, business decision-makers should encourage collaboration in all aspects of the workplace. This will increase the chances of employees taking part in the discussion online, as well. It's important that employees are encouraged to share ideas freely, work transparently, learn from each other and provide constructive criticism within the office walls. Companies should also work to ensure all employees, from interns up to management, feel actively engaged and are willing to participate in collaboration. This will help to build trust in the new work culture.

Evaluate and change social learning tactics to suit employee interests

There's no secret formula to success, so each company should tailor their efforts to fit their employees. It's important to allow for some extent of flexibility so that as the social learning tools become a staple within your organization, the program can evolve with employee needs and wants. For example, some employees may enjoy in-person social learning opportunities, rather than digital-only opportunities. Aflac has seen great success with live social learning through the creation of Knowledge Sharing Network sessions. HR leaders can regularly gather feedback from workers and modify content to ensure the information remains relevant and participants remain active. Also keep in mind that the best social learning occurs when more employees are enthusiastically involved, so business decision-makers should always be considering new and creative ways to engage employees.

A more effective future

With 97 percent of employees and executives agreeing that the level of collaboration in the workplace directly influences the results of a task or project, the benefits of social learning cannot be denied.⁶ Aside from attracting knowledge-thirsty millennials, social learning has also been proven to have a positive impact on training and developing talent. Ultimately, when a team successfully collaborates, they are able to work more effectively.

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⁶ Ingram Micro Advisor. 5 Benefits of Collaboration in the Workplace, <http://www.ingrammicroadvisor.com/unified-communications-and-collaboration/5-benefits-of-collaboration-in-the-workplace> - accessed on Oct. 11, 2016