

How a culture of continuous learning can bridge skills gaps

FT LONGITUDE



The workplace keeps evolving, which means employees must keep learning. While digitalization brings exciting opportunities to upgrade, improve and modernize, the urgent pace of change can also leave organizations vulnerable to skills gaps.

Leaders must invest in upskilling to make sure their people have the knowledge and capabilities required for their organization to compete in an increasingly digital-driven environment and to enable them to take advantage of emerging technologies.

To ensure they stay up-to-date, they need to embrace a culture which is focused on continuous learning and adaptation.

Levelling up

By necessity, most teams are diverse in terms of experience and approaches to work. Hiring from a range of backgrounds is the best way to ensure a well-rounded workforce, but disparities of technical knowledge can impede progress.

Make-A-Wish Foundation UK, a charity that grants the wishes of critically ill children, has continued to invest in platforms such as Microsoft Teams and a new CRM system. Sarah Watson, Director for Finance and Technology, explains: "We have put a lot of investment, in terms of both time and funding, into our infrastructure to support our employees, but we [also] have a lot of volunteers who haven't used these things before. So, we've had to acknowledge the challenges and really take a step back and think about giving everybody that basic level of functionality."

Addressing such inequalities within teams should be a priority for every leader, confirms Adam Knubley, an experienced IT consultant helping businesses with strategy and transformation, currently working with a healthcare organization. "In my current team, we've got people who have been in the same business for 15, 20 years, who are not really ready to deal with the kind of change that the cloud brings," he says. "And then we've got some people who joined recently from larger companies, who are very experienced with [cloud], and we are now getting this valley between these groups, which we need to address."



Gaps must be addressed in order for businesses to keep modernizing and progressing in alignment and at a unified pace. To address them, however, those gaps must first be accurately identified. For this to happen, leaders must provide an environment in which employees feel comfortable admitting that their knowledge is lacking in places and asking for support to improve it.

Employee engagement is crucial

Employee surveys are an important tool in pinpointing needs, but some individuals will be more comfortable sharing in a one-to-one conversation. Whenever he starts at a new company, Knubley organizes 30-minute phone calls with every member of the IT team. “From there, I decide on either a training or upskill program, or an area to focus on,” he says.

Another way to gain honest feedback is to create “focus communities” within the workforce, in which employees take part in guided discussions on particular topics. “Focus communities can be created easily using digital collaborative tools,” enthuses Andrew Davis, Head of Future Workplace Strategy and Growth at Fujitsu. “You build the community and then ask questions like, ‘Which skills are you missing? Which skills would you find useful?’”

Strategies like these also create a positive mindset around learning, and encourage a culture of sharing skills-related concerns without fear of judgment.

Once gaps have been identified, tailor training to individuals

Looking past traditional methods is also crucial to keeping every employee engaged.

Aurore Denos, Associate Director of HR at biotechnology research company Syneos Health, explains that it’s important for employees to have the opportunity to experiment with new tools or software before formal training begins. “It’s better to run an introductory session, and then tell them ‘go and have fun on the platform’, so they can discover more for themselves.”

“We are finding small ways to make big impacts.”

Aurore Denos, Associate Director of HR, Syneos Health

While formal training is important for big roll-outs of technology, building learning into the everyday culture of an organization is the best way to keep up with the constant evolution of the workplace. Allowing employees to engage with technology when it is convenient and useful for them encourages a positive attitude towards new tools and the perception that they are there to help experienced workers attempting to re or upskill, rather than a burden (or a threat).

“With tools like Microsoft Viva, we are able to make learning available in the flow of work – directly from the tools they use most, such as Microsoft Teams,” Davis explains. “Making it easier for people to find training that is useful to them, and enabling them to access it when, where and how it suits their individual circumstances.”

While managers should continue to monitor the progress of their teams and organize more formal group training as required, once learning becomes part of the daily work routine individuals should be able to assess educational opportunities quickly and decide whether they will benefit or not.

“As it evolves, we expect AI to play a greater role in understanding what people need,” says Davis. “[AI can create] insight from seeing what people are working on or the tools they use the most; for example, if they use a lot of Excel, but at a relatively basic level, they would be offered advanced Excel courses. We also expect applications to offer more support and guidance. For example, PowerPoint is already able to help you practice your presentations and make recommendations to make them more impactful.”

“As it evolves, we expect AI to play a greater role in understanding what people need.”

Andrew Davis,
Head of Future Workplace Strategy and Growth,
Fujitsu

Help workers to help themselves

It can be hard to keep track of skills gaps and make sure everyone in a given team is up to speed, especially with the onward march of technological progress continually reshaping the work landscape. However, paying attention to the learning needs of workers, and then helping them find the best way to satisfy those needs, is essential to maintaining a healthy business and a happy workforce.

Investing in the right tools now will allow all employees to start building learning into their everyday work schedules. A culture of continuous learning is the best way to ensure everyone grows with the business and that there are fewer skills gaps in between individuals as a result.

Contact

E-Mail: askfujitsu@fujitsu.com

Website: www.fujitsu.com/global/themes/worklifeshift/

© Fujitsu 2023 | 9227-02. All rights reserved. Fujitsu and Fujitsu logo are trademarks of Fujitsu Limited registered in many jurisdictions worldwide. Other product, service and company names mentioned herein may be trademarks of Fujitsu or other companies. This document is current as of the initial date of publication and subject to be changed by Fujitsu without notice. This material is provided for information purposes only and Fujitsu assumes no liability related to its use.