

How to design and deliver an inclusive workplace learning strategy

Fredrik Högemark

Inclusive workplaces that demonstrate they value equal opportunity and employee development are set up to attract the brightest talent and are more likely to retain their valued, existing employees.

Implementing an effective learning and development (L&D) strategy to boost employee engagement and retention has never been more important, but the same goes for the return on investment in these schemes too.

One McKinsey study discovered a mere 8 per cent of organisations actually evaluate the value of their L&D initiatives by tracking ROI, but without proof of efficacy, development programmes are the first to go when budgets tighten.

So, how can your business promote employee L&D to increase job satisfaction, and improve productivity and commitment in the workplace?

Forget one-size-fits-all

Companies looking to develop an inclusive learning strategy need to consider the preferences of their workforce. Staff of different age backgrounds might learn in different ways, and your personal development offerings need to support this.

For example, a PwC report found only 6 per cent of millennials would benefit from formal classroom training above any other method. Younger

generations that are more fluent with modern technology are likely to prefer training via online courses.

Millennials are set to make up 75 per cent of the workforce by 2025, but businesses should not be swayed into only prioritising support towards this one demographic. You still need to cater to wider employee demographics, as some staff members may lean towards more formal training structures.

Businesses looking to nurture their whole workforce should provide a mix of training options, from independent training to group sessions and peer-to-peer learning.

Understand their needs

Companies looking to improve their employee retention rates should be working with their staff to set personal career goals and, in turn, provide training to ensure they understand where these fit into wider company goals.

It is often easy as a business manager to offer advice to staff and push them in certain directions, but you need to listen to their needs and how they prefer to learn.

The deeper you understand your staff's aspirations, the better you will be able to provide learning activities that truly fit their needs.

The easiest way to get a scope of staff learning preferences is to carry out regular internal surveys. Even if some

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employees opt not to take part, you will still gain a good overall view of areas that need improvement.

Alternatively, you can hold focus groups and speak directly to managers to get feedback from themselves and their teams. This method might even give you more in-depth feedback, as respondents can explain points fully and are not following “tick-in-the-box” system.

Transparency is key

In 2017, Hays found 78 per cent of workers cited career progression as an influential factor when looking for a new job or staying in their current role. This is considered especially important to millennials, as 87 per cent claim “career growth and development” are workplace attributes they want the most.

So, when looking to set your business apart from competitors and attract the top talent, highlight key progression offerings up front, demonstrate how your company encourages an ambitious culture and help employees further their careers.

One way to offer professional development to new graduates is through a rotational scheme, where workers experience different roles across the business to get a greater understanding of the company. This could help you differentiate yourself from competitors when scouting talent.

If you truly invest in employee development, it will get noticed by the right people. Sites like Glassdoor offer employees a platform to rate employers and a place for your dedication to get recognised.

Universities and recruiters also promote organisations with quality training resources and a strong reputation for progression to ambitious graduates.

Working together

According to a Heidrick and Struggles study, workplace mentorship is beneficial – especially for women and minority employees – of who over 30 per cent said it played an “extremely important” role in their career.

This is because mentoring programmes that pair employees together at different levels in their career, or with different skill sets, help staff learn from each other’s experiences.

However, it is not just older employees that have skills to offer their younger colleagues. Companies like Microsoft are adopting a ‘reverse mentoring’ approach, in which younger employees mentor older staff on topics like technology.

Reverse mentoring is inexpensive and time-efficient compared with hiring outside help, and it offers value to both parties. Older employees learn

new skills, and their younger mentors gain management experience.

Regular feedback

A DDI study found only 34 per cent of workers still used skills they had learnt in training after a year. Even if staff can thoroughly demonstrate their knowledge during training, it does not mean they are ready to transfer these skills to their job role.

So, how can you help staff bring new skills into the workplace to give you a strong return on investment from L&D?

One way is to use employee feedback to uncover the areas staff feel they need development in and identify skill gaps within your business, so you are equipping employees with the knowledge they can put into practice. You can then track success through agreed KPIs with staff.

Employers can show they value their staff by providing them with tailored, flexible training programmes. These not only equip employees with the necessary skills for career progression; they also create an inclusive learning culture, bringing with it a strong ROI, improved retention and the chance for teams to really shine.

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