

 Virtual College

**ROUND
TABLE**

Virtual College Roundtable Event

L&D's experience of how learning is changing
as result of hybrid working



On 27th April we held our latest roundtable event to discuss how learning is changing as result of hybrid working. Having invited guests from L&D roles across various industries, it was great to spend some time discussing common challenges that are being faced, as well as share some solutions to these challenges.

We focused the discussions on the following three main key areas...



How has the hybrid working model impacted L&D planning?

The hybrid working model has been adopted by many since the pandemic, as it enables employees to enjoy a better work/life balance whilst still ensuring employers get the commitment from their staff that they need to fulfil their roles. But what impact has this had on L&D planning? It actually seems that there are positives as well as negatives, as uncovered in our chats...

Many said that training is much more accessible now, given that people can access it at a place and time to suit them, but as people learn differently this approach might not suit everyone. **L&D leads need to allow time to be supportive to learners who are struggling.** For example, some employers may have seen resistance from some members of staff who may not feel comfortable with new technologies, as they are used to the face-to-face approach for their training needs.

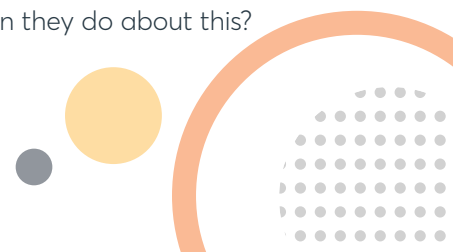
Linked to this, technology has opened up many more chances to conduct training, but is it engaging enough? A few people commented that it's hard to have half of attendees in person and half online as it means things are missed and people can often stay quiet for fear of speaking over others or being spoken over. Based on this, some attendees commented that face-to-face learning can still be better for certain training needs. **A blended approach to learning styles may be the best way forward to facilitate the different ways that people learn.**

The key to a lot of this though is **understanding how your learners learn**, and this can be different from business to business, but also department to department. An attendee who works within a law firm explained how they tried hybrid working before Covid and found it didn't work in terms of engagement with learning material. They had a blended approach already but found that the online pieces were often not completed, but since Covid this is no longer the case. They have found that their employees expect learning to be done online and, in some cases, prefer it. Backing this comment up, an NHS employee stated that they still find collaboration difficult between people face to face, however as a workforce they have never been more collaborative due to MS Teams meetings that allow them to share their L&D ideas more freely.

Hybrid working also allows for people to live further away from their office base, which can be a positive, but this can also have a negative impact in that it can be difficult to create a strong team culture when people are coming into the office on fewer occasions. **L&D teams, therefore, need to ensure that throughout their plans they incorporate ways of bringing teams together to help foster and drive a new team culture.**

Another attendee, who works as a Health & Safety Manager, explained that for them, online training was brought in as a necessity due to Covid, as it allowed them to still facilitate mandatory training. Since this though – as engagement is up and hybrid working is here to stay – they're now looking at permanently having training as a blended approach. **Training was brought in as a necessity but now it's a choice.**

Therefore, it's clear that hybrid working has changed and influenced learning cultures; however, some L&D functions are feeling they now have less influence on stakeholders. So, what can they do about this?





Should L&D teams be integrated with other departments to truly understand training requirements of employees?

Learning and Development teams can often think all they need to do is provide the plan and programmes to help people develop, but unless it is structured to actually solve a problem being experienced by the people, then they won't care! The problem is because their plans aren't focused on what people are trying to do, it's focused on what L&D teams think people should learn and there's a massive disconnect there.

An employee of the HMRC stated that as their organisation is so large their L&D teams can find collaboration with other departments really difficult but agreed that more integration across other teams would really benefit them and have a positive impact on their plans. Another attendee went on to talk about their experience and explaining that they find it hard to integrate with other departments as they are also fighting to prove delivery or worth, therefore challenges and aspirations aren't always communicated from the initial point of conversation. This can lead to L&D teams not always being able to understand the strategic direction and learning that is therefore needed to support this.

It was then quite rightly pointed out that **building stronger cross functional relationships is necessary to understand the learning that is required. L&D teams need to focus on this rather than what they can do to make learning more attractive.**

To **engage stakeholders** it's all about being outcome focused. There isn't a rebranding exercise that needs to be done before action; L&D teams just need to try something in a new way. Then follow this up with conversations about what needs to happen as a result of an intervention and not what should be included or how that should be presented.

In order to get closer to the actual learning and development needs within each department or team, asking simple questions such as these – and understanding the answers – can help:

- What do you want to achieve as a result of the training?
- What's not happening now?
- Who specifically do we need to influence?
- Who is responsible for the way the work is done and, therefore, the results?



So, what do L&D departments need to do differently?

There was one thing that came out in all the breakout sessions throughout this event when discussing what L&D teams need to do differently and that was **L&D functions need to get closer to the needs of their learners and understand how and why they want to learn.**

Learners needs and requirements have changed. They expect on-demand training, they want to be handheld, but also have options for exploring their learning more if they wish to do so. They also want a range of ways that the learning is delivered to keep up interest (live online, e-learning and in class) **Employees want FLEXIBILITY and online learning options are now expected.** Considerations need to be made about when learners decide to learn, such as how can we encourage colleagues to learn across the working day rather than leaving it until the end when people may be more fatigued and energy levels dropped?

To help with this, one person explained how they offer multiple live sessions to give people the option to attend when it suits their schedule and their desire to learn (i.e. first Wednesday of the month at 10am and 3rd Thursday of the month at 2pm). This offers the flexibility they expect and shows the importance of the topic.

Another comment that really got people talking was how they feel now that L&D teams need to be **'reactive rather than proactive'**. Being planned isn't always the best way forward as how can you plan for training needs that crop up? Sometimes having the ability to react quickly can serve learners better than planning for their anticipated requirements.

Another common conversation point was around how **'learning in the flow of work'** can help to create efficiencies and value within departments, collaborating on the learning that can support the procedure or process. Linked back to an earlier comment that if L&D teams can get closer to the point of need for learning, their programmes will be better received and can help create **real behaviour change.**

It also became apparent through conversations that work also needs to be done to improve communication and visibility of the projects and successes that L&D has on an organisation. By promoting this success and evidencing the ROI, L&D teams can build a stronger case for support and investment; however, it can be difficult to quantify feedback from learners and include this in the evidence.

Also, there still seems to be a resistance of online training in a number of organisations. Training can still be quite traditional, and the learning culture still needs to change to adopt 'learning in the flow of work'. Unfortunately for some, L&D is still seen as a box-ticking exercise and there needs to be a cultural shift.

Having a flexible and blended approach to learning is one way that L&D teams can adapt their methods and provide a learning programme which is inclusive for all. One example provided by an attendee was how a group of new graduate recruits were given the option of face-to-face or remote induction training: two thirds wanting face-to-face and one third wanting remote training on Teams. By offering both options, everyone was satisfied with a positive learning experience that suited them.

There isn't one solution to this, but it is clear that it is about the following:

- Providing more ROI feedback
- Discovering what interests the person at the desk (the learner)
- Driving the successful outcome of learning
- Offering flexibility and choice
- Celebrating successes



In conclusion...

To sum up the event Jez Anderson, Learning Solutions Consultant here at VC, talked through some questions that all L&D teams should be asking themselves in order to help improve their L&D programmes...

- How do we increase engagement levels?
- What interests the people at their desk, your learners?
- How do we get to know more about our employees in order to be able to create engaging learning for them?
- Are learners still curious or are they being spoon fed information?
- How do we use data to influence?
- Are we building structures to enable learners to take control?

Covid and hybrid working have given L&D teams the opportunity to think of the best way to offer training to their learners. Options including e-learning and remote training via Teams or Zoom are here to stay. Learners have become more curious and don't expect learning to be automatically provided, they are happy to search out learning and topics which interest them.

L&D teams need to expect more from themselves. Rather than just being responsible for providing content and delivering programs, they need to prove they understand what is required of them through conversations with stakeholders. All this can then be backed up by the solutions that they provide, giving people what they need in the context of where they work and when they actually need it.