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Bringing digital natives to baby boomers thanks to e-learning

Can online training unite different generations of workers and how?

Despite worrying data on youth unemployment, the increase in life expectancy and the raising of the retirement age have led to the meeting of four different generations in the workplace. Four typical workers with different functions and a work culture, but all with the same need: continuous training. What is the role of eLearning in forming such a diverse workforce? What is the answer to an intergenerational pact?

Four generations and their approach to online education

According to the definition of the Center for Generational Kinetics, a generation is a group of individuals born at the same time and place and who share preferences, characteristics and values throughout their life. This makes us understand how important it is to know the generations when we talk about an approach to life and, consequently, to the work that unites millions of people. Today the job market consists of four generations:

Generation Z

They were born from 1996 onwards and many of them approach the world of work for the first time. They are totally flexible to training, especially if organized for very short content. Microlearning is the key word for this generation.

Generation Y or Millenials

Those born between 1977 and 1995 (for some up to 2000) are part of a hinge generation between a pre- and post-advent period of digital technology. They currently represent around 50% of the workforce in the United States. The Millenials have a hybrid approach to training, being able to easily follow online and classroom, interactive and textbook based courses. The aspect they value most in eLearning is flexibility and the ability to combine life and work. Autonomy is the watchword of the Millenials.

Generation X

They were born between 1965 and 1976 and, although they are accustomed to traditional classroom training systems, they recognize that one of the major challenges to be faced is that of digitization. Therefore they are open to new training tools, including online training that allows them to learn with their own time. On the job training is the most appreciated one, especially if it serves to solve a concrete problem.

Baby Boomers

Many of the people born between 1946 and 1964 would be retired if the retirement age had not been raised, especially in European states. The others find themselves finishing the last working years with an extra burden compared to the previous generation: transmitting their knowledge to a generation more trained and open to the digital revolution. Online training is a way to convey one's knowledge in an innovative way, but classroom training continues to play an essential role for this generation. A blended methodology is the most suitable.

The advantages of eLearning for a multigenerational workforce

Different generations could find eLearning to be a great cohesion tool. Despite the technological gap, all generations appreciate the freedom to learn with their own time.

E-learning can reduce the technological and training gap between different generations by offering:

- personalized training adapted to everyone's learning pace, regardless of age;
- the flexibility needed to learn how and where you want, managing to combine work with study, family or personal conditions;
- the possibility to choose courses in the most congenial formats for everyone (text, videos, podcasts, simulations);
- the peace of mind of learning contents divided into small modules and usable at the time of need, in free time or during working hours, to learn or update at work.

The training needs of the four generations that make up the workforce are different, as is the approach to eLearning. Online courses, however, allow the entire workforce to learn how, where and when they want, both in the workplace and independently, thus reducing the technological and training gap.