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Collaborative learning: what it is and what advantages it offers companies

The new generations have very different training needs from previous ones and collaborative learning seems to satisfy them better than other approaches. Let's find out why.

Collaborative learning refers to a training method based on **collaboration**, which moves away from traditional classroom dynamics and favors a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Collaborative learning redefines the ancient notion of **solitary** knowledge acquisition, emphasizing the collective intelligence of a group. This approach is rooted in the philosophy of thinking that students build knowledge **together** through shared experiences, discussions and problem solving activities. As a result, collaborative learning extends from classrooms to boardrooms, revolutionizing the way individuals acquire, apply and retain information.

The science behind collaborative learning

There are several psychological theories that explain the success of this model, but in a general way we can say that the main ones are the **social learning** theory and the **cognitive load** theory. In essence, collaborative learning is successful because it manages to implement these psychological mechanisms. Let's see what they are exactly.

Social learning theory

At the basis of collaborative learning is the theory of social learning, developed by Albert Bandura. This theory holds that individuals learn not only through personal experience, but also by **observing, imitating, and interacting with others**. In a collaborative work environment, this theory comes to life when employees absorb the knowledge, skills and behaviors of their colleagues through shared experiences and teamwork.

Cognitive load theory

Collaborative learning optimizes cognitive load. This theory, developed by John Sweller, emphasizes the management of mental effort during learning. When individuals work together, they can **distribute** tasks, **share** information, and collectively **solve** problems, **reducing everyone's cognitive load** and improving retention by focusing on smaller, more manageable components of a task or concept.

The advantages of collaborative learning

Numerous studies in the fields of educational psychology and cognitive science have explored the effectiveness of collaborative learning, shedding light on its advantages from different perspectives.

More effective for dealing with complex topics

The biggest and perhaps most obvious advantage of this method is that collaborative learning is more effective for learning complex concepts than traditional models. By encouraging collaboration and teamwork, more complex concepts can be acquired with the help of colleagues who offer different points of view and a counterpart to discuss with.

Engagement through collaboration

Collaborative learning fuels **intrinsic motivation** by satisfying the psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, as outlined by **self-determination** theory. When employees feel a sense of autonomy in learning, perceive that their

competence improves through collaboration and experience a strong sense of connection with colleagues, they become more engaged and invested in their work: psychology calls this process self-determination and it is very important to an individual.

Improve critical thinking

Collaborative learning stimulates **critical thinking** by encouraging students to discuss ideas, question assumptions and evaluate different points of view. According to research published in the "Journal of Educational Psychology", students engaged in collaborative activities tend to display higher levels of critical thinking, problem solving and creativity than those who learn with traditional methods.

Better communication skills

Working in groups allows students to develop better **communication** skills, both verbal and non-verbal. Through discussions, debates, and collaborative projects, individuals learn to express their thoughts clearly, listen actively, and understand different perspectives. A meta-analysis published in "Review of Educational Research" concluded that collaborative learning significantly improves communication skills, essential for academic and professional success.

Increased loyalty and commitment

Some studies have shown that collaborative learning promotes better information retention. When students actively participate in discussions or teach concepts to their peers, they strengthen their understanding of the material. Additionally, the interactive nature of collaborative learning keeps students engaged and motivated, leading to improved academic performance.

Social and emotional development

Collaborative learning promotes social skills and **emotional intelligence**. By working in groups, students learn to manage conflict, build trust and develop empathy. This fosters a positive classroom environment and helps students cultivate essential interpersonal skills that are valuable in their personal and professional lives.

How collaborative learning can benefit a company

Improved communication and collaboration in the workplace

A **2018 LinkedIn study** found that communication and collaboration are two of the most important soft skills employees can learn from research and development programs. In fact, 92% of executives said soft skills are equal to or more valuable than technical skills to employees across the company. With a good collaborative learning program, you can help employees learn both professional and social skills at the same time.

Researchers M. Laal and S. Ghodsi conducted a **meta-analysis of hundreds of studies on collaborative learning** and found that learning together leads students to develop better problem-solving skills and develop social skills such as empathy and social understanding.

Diversification of knowledge at company level

There are people in your organization who are experts in a wide range of topics and no doubt there are other people who are completely ignorant about those same topics. Systematic collaborative learning can help you consolidate employees' unique experiences and knowledge to strengthen the entire company.

Collaborative learning, in fact, helps employees overcome their so-called "**zone of proximal development**". In a learning context, this is the distance between what a person can learn on their own and what they can learn with the help of someone else.

In other words, it can be said that, if there is a limit to what you can teach yourself, there is no limit to what others can teach. It may be very difficult for an employee to learn a topic on their own with only a passive online resource available.

The best way to facilitate this diversification is to **decentralize content creation**. Instead of releasing courses based on what you think employees want to learn, let employees identify their learning needs. A **study from Tehran University of Medical**

Sciences goes a step further, stating that the benefits of diversifying knowledge extend beyond the material learned in the course itself. As people get to know each other and understand the unique strengths of their colleagues, we begin to see the development of learning communities that build on and amplify team members' core knowledge.

Different perspectives and inclusiveness

One of the greatest strengths of collaborative learning lies in its ability to embrace diversity. Group work brings together individuals with different backgrounds, experiences and learning styles. This diversity fosters a rich exchange of ideas, encourages empathy towards different points of view and promotes a more inclusive learning environment. However, effectively implementing collaborative learning requires careful planning and facilitation. Educators play a key role in structuring activities that encourage active participation, establish clear objectives and ensure equal contribution from all group members. Providing feedback and direction during group interactions is essential to maximizing learning outcomes.

Conclusions

To conclude, we can say that collaborative learning is a pedagogical approach supported by numerous research and evidence. Its many benefits go beyond academic achievement and include the development of crucial life skills. By embracing collaboration in educational settings, we not only improve learning outcomes, but we also prepare individuals to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. In essence, science unequivocally supports the power of collaborative learning, highlighting its ability to train well-rounded, adaptable and socially competent individuals, ready to face the challenges of the future.