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Learning in the flow of work: how to put it into practice?

The spread of hybrid working has led to the success of the so-called LIFOW. Let's find out what it is, how to apply it and how it improves company training.

In many sectors, work is becoming hybrid and corporate training is adapting to provide employees with learning resources accessible at any time. This mode, called "LIFOW", is revolutionising corporate training.

What is LIFOW

While smart working allows us to work from home, have more flexibility in managing our personal lives and wake up a few minutes later in the morning, it also makes learning more difficult. It is not possible to ask for help from the boss in the next office, or advice from the colleague with whom you share a desk. This can make work more stressful because it is more difficult, when you are alone, to find answers quickly.
In fact, a survey by BetterUp shows that maintaining efficient communication and collaboration is one of the main problems associated with smart working. One of the most successful solutions is called **LIFOW**, which stands for **Learning In the Flow of Learning**.

When we work, we often use different messaging apps that allow us to exchange messages and documents of all kinds. All these tools mean that we are literally bombarded with messages. Between answering company chats, emails and attending company meetings, employees have fewer and fewer opportunities to spend time learning new things. This was a problem even before the pandemic when people went to the office every day. But with the arrival of smart working, time for training has become impossible to find.

The LIFOW concept proposes a solution to this problem through a system of continuous learning, i.e. **giving employees access to all learning resources while they work**.

Importance of LIFOW

This approach serves to address a change that, like it or not, is taking place before our eyes. Work is changing and the impact of hybrid work is evident. Several studies indicate that in this context employees are more likely to continue working after hours and spend more time chatting about their own business with colleagues. It is more difficult, in this context, to understand where and when work begins and ends. This shows that hybrid work is changing the way we experience work.

In general, we can say that the LIFOW model fits into this context with two advantages:

- LIFOW can have a significant impact because it brings the concepts of learning and working closer together, providing an ideal strategy for **corporate training**.
- In addition, in LIFOW, learning is perfectly integrated into the **workflow**; therefore, companies no longer have to "take away" time from work to dedicate to training.

What do employees think?

We have seen that the LIFOW model has several advantages and fits perfectly with the characteristics of today's working world. But what do employees say about it?
A survey conducted by Training Industry reveals interesting data about employees' perceptions of LIFOW. Eighty per cent of participants said they prefer a **synchronised learning** method where employees learn while they work, for example through a coach who follows them as they perform daily tasks. 50% of the participants who followed synchronised training claimed that the training they received was effective. By comparison, only 30% of those who received non-synchronised training stated that

they received effective training.

What is the difference with traditional training methods?

In the traditional training model, training takes place long before the acquired knowledge can be put into practice. Usually when it is time to put this knowledge into practice it is too late, our brain has forgotten the information we have learned. This is not speculation, but research in education that has been going on for centuries. The novelty of the LIFOW model lies in the fact that it provides the necessary information when it is really needed. This method is particularly effective because it **provides the right information at the moment when the employee is most ready to learn**: when he or she has to put this knowledge into practice.
In this way, the resulting learning experience is perfectly in line with the job at hand. **Training is no longer a separate moment from work** but becomes an integral part of it, improving life for employees and saving companies money.

What design should be considered to enable the LIFOW model?

Since it is a learning mode that aims to solve the problems related to a hybrid working environment one of the key components of the LIFOW model is accessibility. There cannot be someone who determines where, what and how employees should be trained.

Let us look at some of the real pillars you need to know in order to put the LIFOW model into practice.

Accessibility
Accessibility is fundamental to LIFOW. Employees must have easy access whenever they want to the knowledge they need to do their job.

Ease
Creating a method that facilitates the consumption of this information is another key component. Companies should create responsive designs that allow employees to access information from any device without having to spend time searching for the content they are looking for.

Personalisation
Companies should create designs that accommodate learners' ability to customise their learning paths.

Curating content
The absence of a figure who constantly guides employees in their training is one of the characteristics of this method. Although in some cases LIFOW can pass through coaches, the key to this method is to make employees autonomous in using and managing company training. This means that a company cannot just throw all the company training material in a shared folder and the employee has to go and look for the information he needs among thousands of files. The system needs to be quick and easy, with thoughtful designs that allow the employee to easily navigate and quickly find the information.

Feedback
In this model more than in others employee feedback is vital. This system is for the employees and will be used mainly by them. If they find the application of the LIFOW model complicated or inefficient, then it becomes a counterproductive tool.

How can LIFOW be useful in training employees?

The LIFOW model provides several ways to support employees and help them improve performance.

It facilitates spontaneous learning
Traditional forms of learning are limited by time. LIFOW allows employees to practice when they want and hone their skills, even those acquired in traditional training courses.

Reinforces training
In the case of companies that have remote employees, these tools are the only means to update and in some cases even train employees.

Solves the learning curve problem
Normally we forget 70% of what we learn in the first 24 hours and 90% after a week. LIFOW would solve this problem through "how to" tools (pop-ups, for example) that assist users in the tasks they are doing.

It helps to transpose what is learned to the workplace.
If a company wants to rely mainly on traditional training models, integration with the LIFOW model offers the possibility of accelerating the process of employees turning what they have learned into work.

Teaches new knowledge and reinforces employees' skills
In a hybrid environment where trainers cannot always be available to assist employees LIFOW is a resource that is available to the employee around the clock.

What strategies need to be put in place to make LIFOW a reality?

There are various tools that are used by companies to facilitate the LIFOW model, below we will look at some of them.

Microlearning
Training through short and concise content is fundamental to this training method. When an employee needs help, they cannot afford to waste half an hour searching and studying the information they need. Short contents are essential to learn when needed and quickly.

mLearning
Learning through content delivered by smartphone makes training easily accessible. The possibility of accessing content through more than one device is very important to facilitate the usability of the tools that determine the LIFOW method.

VBL/IVBL
Both video-based-learning and interactive-video-based-learning are useful tools for LIFOW. These tools are videos, sometimes interactive, that convey information through clear and short videos. They are in fact microlearning tools, but have been listed separately because they are very efficient and increasingly popular.

Live help
In hectic working environments there is no option to interrupt work to learn. In these cases there are performance support tools such as PDF documents, or short videos, or pop-ups that assist the employee to perform tasks correctly.

Content curation
An efficient LIFOW model allows employees to grow quickly because they are given the information they need when they need it. Having curated content, organised in clear and intuitive indexes is vital to the LIFOW model.

Maintain social learning
A significant percentage of what we learn comes from socialising with bosses, colleagues and friends. If the LIFOW model cancels out socialising with colleagues, then there is a problem. There must always be attention to this aspect of training, which is often underestimated in LIFOW models.

User generated content
The possibility for employees themselves to create content and organise it in ways that they think are best is an important aspect of LIFOW. This allows experienced colleagues to pass on their knowledge and experience to those who do not have it, thus speeding up the learning process.

When a company implements the LIFOW model it must keep in mind the importance of a continuous feedback loop from the company's training providers and employees. Therefore the system that hosts the LIFOW model in a company must allow it to be modified and updated easily.
Another aspect that can be useful is the possibility to interface with experts. The ability to interface with experts helps to sediment information.

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