ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 208 Wednesday 22 june 2022

The importance of Self-Directed Learning in the enterprise

Trained and motivated employees are the main asset of a dynamic company. The two do not always walk in parallel.

With Self-Directed Learning, HR managers can incentivize employee autonomy and increase the skill base in the company.

Navigating high waters: career is not a straight path

Life long learning is an essential element of professional longevity. Whatever the level of study and the tasks performed, every employee or collaborator in various capacities is called upon to acquire new skills periodically. This, both in the case of careers carried out entirely in the same company, and-now more frequently-in the case of a change of workplace or career.

This need places the responsibility for one's own growth path on the worker. In a job market where seniority alone is no longer either a guarantee of career advancement or job security, knowing how to imagine a **range of possible career evolutions** is one of the key qualities. If I am a young technician, I can imagine that in a few years I can become a technical office manager. As an alternative to the natural development path, I might turn to after-sales service, if my knowledge of the company's products is deep enough. Depending on the size of the company, I might become responsible for a product line or, if I have also developed adequate interpersonal soft skills, reinvent myself in sales and leverage my technical skills. Later in life, I might even remain active in a consulting role in the industry. Well understood, this vision is neither an immediate nor a static awareness: the important thing is that it is there.

Let's add an additional layer of complexity. Thinking about where to direct one's career is also **insurance against uncertainty**. Not only has it become more common to change employers, it has also become questionable. Of course, the problem is when the employment relationship ends abruptly. But changing after an appropriate number of years may be the best way to gain recognition for one's progress, both in terms of responsibility and economically.

All this brings us to the essential point: acquiring the right set of skills and knowledge that will allow one's career to advance. It can be summarized with this phrase: **continuous training for continuous evolution**.

The Learning Organization: when the enterprise has clear ideas.

So, devising one's training path serves to secure one's career path. In any a company where there is proper consideration of internal skills assets, this is possible thanks to training courses, many of which are now delivered in **eLearning** mode, the benefits of which are increasingly recognized.

For those companies that are more attentive to continuing education, the corporate organization itself fits this purpose. In these companies, which adopt a vision of themselves as **Learning Organizations**, the Chief Learning Officer (**CLO**) becomes the figure responsible for implementing a Continuous Integration of Learning and Strategy (**CILS**) program. With this organizational solution, HR's contribution to corporate strategy finds better application. It is the company that recognizes the importance of increasing and preserving its skills base to ensure the best chances for development. Once again: continuous training for continuous evolution. Only it is company-wide level.

A question remains: how can the employee acquire those **skills** that would not be directly related to the natural evolution of his or her position in the company? If a Lerarning Organization has rightly considered the importance of competencies, the risk is that staff development programs are as well-defined as they are inflexible. The employee is on a train, perhaps a high-speed train: they know they will arrive at their destination, but once they embark on a journey, that will be the destination.

Self Directed Learning and LXP: free to decide

What can align the needs of a dynamic enterprise and its employees is a conscious choice toward **Self Directed Learning**, the power of the individual to choose all or part of his or her own personalized training path. For this decision-making autonomy to yield the desired results, the individual must:

- analyze his or her own training needs;
- set educational objectives;
- find teaching resources;
- choose his or her own learning strategies;
- evaluate their own learning goals.

It is the individual's **internal motivation** that drives the autonomous learning process. Others, superiors, colleagues or friends, may provide suggestions or support, but the drive comes from within the person. Likewise, it is the individual who decides his or her own **educational goals**: in the work environment, as mentioned, they are related to job and salary prospects. There is an active search for sources and **learning materials**: one can learn from anything or anyone, if one pays enough attention. Similarly, **learning strategies** are also at personal discretion: once one has decided what one wants to learn, the best approach is trial and error; that is, experimenting with different methods and ways to get to the goal. It is the student who decides whether the effort is yielding the desired results or whether it is appropriate to change something along the way. Finally, a self-student will be more inclined to **critically evaluate the results obtained**.

If in the case of a student, autonomy is complete, in the case of a worker, training material can already largely be found in the company or, thanks to the company, among industry sources: trade press, professional organizations, etc.

This approach has its natural expression in eLearning, with the **distinction between LMS and LXP**. A **Learning Management System (LMS)** is software that allows for the delivery and tracking of eLearning course metrics, where a **Learning Experience Platform** extends the scope of user behaviors that can be tracked to activities such as participating in the forum linked to the course or consulting audio and video materials to support the lesson.

The main difference between the two philosophies lies in the possibility granted by an LXP to **enjoy the learning material presented more freely**: it is the user who chooses his or her own path, being able to delve deeper into a concept and deviate from the main track. This faculty is enhanced when the available library of courses is of adequate size and when choices can be supported and assisted by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning algorithms. User behavior reveals the user's potential interests; the machine makes them explicit.

Strategies for an SDL in the enterprise

A company that wants to foster and stimulate an autonomous approach to learning should adopt a composite strategy:

- Nurture the fundamentals of learning
- Provide support for training and practice
- Define moments for feedback and evaluation

The enterprise should understand the learning needs and preferences of its employees. Then choose appropriate technology tools, including an LXP, as mentioned above. Finally, create an environment and culture that rewards continuing education and independent decision-making.
A self-taught person is one who finds ways to reinforce his or her learning at every opportunity: a company should carefully consider how to foster both autonomous training and practice for its consolidation.
Autonomy must bring results, otherwise it risks being an end in itself. The person in charge of training should arrange times when the self-taught person is called upon to evaluate the results obtained: greater autonomy should be matched by greater responsibility. This is also to allow for possible course correction: being self-taught does not remove the need to receive guidance on directions to take.