ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 7 - number 235 Wednesday 22 february 2023

The skills needed in the digital age

We find out why digital skills training needs to be reconsidered and which skills are essential to keep teams competitive.

The digital transformation affects all sectors and is expanding the list of digital skills needed to do one's job. In this context, companies are faced with the challenge of updating their **digital skills training**. In this article we explore what skills are essential to keep employees competitive.

Building strong teams in a flexible workplace

Employees may have adapted quickly to the shift to remote working, but this does not necessarily mean that they possess the digital skills that are essential to do their jobs. A company must be able to offer its employees the skills needed to meet the new challenges brought by a new working environment. According to **recent research**, many companies are doing more training and retraining to support the new processes and technology brought by the pandemic. More than two-thirds (68 per cent) of the organisations surveyed said they use training to manage changes within the organisation. Another 65% use it to train employees on new technologies.
These figures indicate that the time has come for companies to update their training programmes to ensure that employees do not just adapt to the new working environment, but help people thrive in it.

Examples of digital skills

While it is true that technology has been changing the way we work for a long time, it is also true that we have been using smartphones and computers on a daily basis for years now. The question, then, is: do we not already have the necessary skills for a more digital working environment?

The truth is that technology is constantly evolving, as is the way we use it. In such a revolutionary time for training, when the world's biggest companies are investing in this area and new technologies are being invented and tested all the time, the only way to keep up is to invest in **keeping employees up to date**.

Here are some examples of how even the most tech-savvy employees could benefit from upgrading:

- A team leader may already be comfortable keeping in touch with their employees between meetings through a messaging app, but now they need to learn how to manage a remote workforce through activity tracking software.
- Employees already know how to work perfectly well with digital files, but are unsure how to manage security and protect sensitive data now that they access the company network from an external connection.
- A salesperson nearing retirement who used to visit or host customers in person may have already used specific software for simple functions such as keeping track of metrics and transactions. Now, however, he or she has to learn how to converse with potential customers online, follow up their enquiries via e-mail and be equally personal in virtual meetings.

In these cases, employees' knowledge of basic digital skills is not up to the current demands of the workplace. One may think that they will upgrade with on-the-job experience and hope for a short learning curve, but most companies prefer to use training to upgrade employees' skills.

Essential digital skills

Digital skills are essential for the growth of any company. You need to train your team on all these changes in order to remain competitive, but upskilling and retraining are also key to supporting and retaining top talent in an increasingly flexible working environment. Indeed, the younger generation increasingly values personal growth as well as career, and training is the key to

ensuring that employees can do this.

But what exactly are the skills on which to focus?
Although every company has specific needs, when looking at the refresher courses around today there are **four general types of skills** that almost always appear. Refresher courses tend to further subdivide these four types of skills and decline them according to the needs of the company they are aimed at, but in general it can be said that they are not limited to technical and practical skills; in fact, soft skills are important in personal growth (such as being able to express more leadership) as well as in the transition to predominantly digital management and communication.

1. Technical skills
The most obvious training is that which teaches employees **how to use the technology** they rely on daily to do their work. These employees may need an introduction to basic tools and functions, such as how to host and participate in a virtual meeting or how to create an online presentation. Or they might need more advanced training on technical skills. For example, the company's implementation of new tools can lead to even the most tech-savvy employees having problems because they are unfamiliar with the tools. The point is that whatever technology a company relies on, it must be sure that its team knows how to use these tools to their full potential.

2. Processes and efficiency
Digital skills require more than a basic understanding of the technology involved. To ensure that ongoing activities are not lost or interrupted, best **practices for using digital tools** must be identified and communicated.
For example, in a work environment where employees work remotely and on different schedules, as daily project team meetings are not always easy to organise, it is possible to use task management software to organise daily activities but also to monitor progress and get advice on how to do your job correctly.

To obtain the benefits of this technology, it is necessary to train employees on the features and functions of the platform. In addition, it is good to educate teams on company-specific processes to get projects through the platform. For example, who plays what role? How and when do you share developments on your part of the project? How do you pass a task from one employee to another?

It is therefore necessary to know beforehand the structural changes that the implementation of these technologies will have on the company and then to establish guidelines and train people on processes and procedures to make the work run smoothly and without confusion.

3. Computer Security
Computer security is a topic we hear about more and more often. Working remotely involves more online access to company files and information and this means a greater **risk of sensitive data being stolen**. Team training on how to protect company information and processes must be a top priority, especially in this day and age when cases of hackers stealing data are commonplace.
In a **study** on cybersecurity preparedness, employees were asked questions about their knowledge of cybersecurity best practices, online security habits and ability to recognise security threats. They were then tested on this knowledge. One result was that 60 per cent of the employees who failed the quiz said they felt safe from online security threats. So, when it comes to protecting sensitive information online, many people underestimate the risks.
To keep data safe, companies take refresher courses on topics such as:

- Secure remote working
- Online privacy and data protection
- Password protection
- Malware, ransomware and viruses
- Network security and cloud computing
- Data breaches

A corporate data breach can cost a lot, especially in terms of reputation, and can be a threat to your company's success. Training employees on cybersecurity is crucial as every company is becoming increasingly digital.

4. Online communication
Online employee communications must give a **good image of the company**. For most people, it is easy to be professional and

respectful in person; however, communicating and doing business online may not be as intuitive.
It can be frustrating for customers to receive an email that does not answer all their questions, and for employees to receive an email or message that does not provide all the details they need to do their jobs. Similarly, an online meeting that takes a rude or defensive tone can damage business relationships.
To avoid these mistakes, companies tend to train employees on proper online communication. In particular, these refresher courses focus on so-called soft skills that help employees to give their best with both colleagues and customers.

There is no doubt that the future will continue to be strongly influenced by technology. Just as technology is constantly evolving, so must digital skills training. This is why regularly reviewing course content and updating and enriching it with new topics is essential for any company of any size.
With the increase in flexible working situations, companies need to ensure that they are equipped to train their remote workforce and office-based employees with engaging and effective content.