

# HRD

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& A NEW OPPORTUNITY*

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“CHANGE REQUIRES PRAGMATISM,  
OPTIMISM AND BRINGING PEOPLE  
ON THE JOURNEY, EVEN WHEN  
THERE IS RELUCTANCE”

HELEN REDFERN  
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
KIER GROUP PLC.

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ARTICLE BY JIM O'BRIEN, CEO - TACK TMI

# DISCOVERY CHANNEL

"ONE-IN-FOUR WORKERS ARE NOW PLANNING A JOB CHANGE AND AS THE 'GREAT RESIGNATION' PLAYS OUT, EMPLOYEES WE USED TO KNOW ARE NOT THE ONES WE SEE NOW. THEY ARE MORE MOBILE, WIELD MORE ECONOMIC POWER AND THEY CAN AFFORD TO LEAVE JOBS"

*According to a recent CIPD study, 66 percent of employees surveyed do not understand why they are engaging in L&D<sup>1</sup>. This a shockingly high figure considering the money invested in L&D and the skills shortage many organisations are facing. If the majority of employees do not see why they need to learn, as HR professionals, we have a serious problem on our hands. So, what is going wrong and why are employees losing interest in their learning?*

We need to understand the challenges employees face. A recent survey by Microsoft revealed that 39 percent of employees feel exhausted, 54 percent feel overworked and 46 percent feel less connected to their companies. With the additional challenges brought about by the pandemic over the last two years, it is easy to see how employees may feel so overwhelmed by their everyday roles. They have little bandwidth to even consider their development, let alone take the time out to review the learning on offer and take part in it.

Knowledge is ubiquitous these days, employees can learn quickly and more easily than ever before. It could be argued that much of the traditional L&D training that was typically delivered,

could now be found online for free, which means that the perceived value of corporate learning has decreased. In the industrial era, people would stay in an unfulfilling role - often for life - content with the pension and the gold watch. But now, with one-in-four workers now planning a job change<sup>2</sup> and as the 'Great Resignation' plays out, employees we used to know are not the ones we see now. They are more mobile, wield more economic power - they can afford to leave jobs - and they want more than just remuneration. Yet we know from the work of psychologists like, Susan Fowler and Dan Pink, that people need that sense of mastery in their work and they need to feel like they are increasing their capability.

This disengagement in learning could have serious consequences for our employees' longer-term motivation and performance. We have to help them create the space for and see the value in, the learning on offer. So, what does that mean for the learning we make available? Well, it has to be good and it must help people build their capability. Despite what we know to be learning best practice, many organisations are still pedalling dull, dusty, dated one-size-fits-all training and it is likely to be tight timeframes and budgets that are to blame. It is rare these days that organisations invest in skills gap analysis, to really understand the learning needs of people. As a result, even when new learning is created, the content does not

always land, the examples might not feel relevant and people do not walk away brimming with practical new skills and an eagerness to implement them. If we zoom out and look more broadly at the labour market, organisations in which learning is left behind the curve, are in real trouble. In the developed world, the balance between employer and employee is undoubtedly shifting. Job vacancies are at an all-time high, a so-called “war on talent” is raging across sectors and businesses are in a battle for the best candidates. In this climate, experienced and skilled individuals have more choice than ever on where they work. With so many options available to them, they will look to the details to decide between roles, two of which is bound to be career development and learning opportunities. Elevating L&D could become one of the significant hooks to bring in the best talent and keep it. If we zoom out even further and look at society, there are clues as to what we need to do. Everything is becoming more personalised and more automatic, our tastes and preferences are noted and remembered. Think of the frustration we now feel if we have to enter our card details instead of them auto-populating. We have become very quickly accustomed to a heavily personalised user experience and L&D needs to catch up. Above all, digital learning must engage, the content has to be expertly curated, the user experience must be seamless and the platform has to lead them on a journey that encourages them to consume more. Beyond these big ideas, there is more we can do to revitalise the L&D brand and here are five suggestions that can make the biggest difference.

*Make learning aspirational and exclusive:* Make it seem special. The last ten years have seen a move away from residential training, taking people off-site, giving them a nice lunch and an inspiring speaker. Perhaps now is the time to add some sparkle back into our learning. Spend some money, take people out of the workflow, out of the office, out of their homes and give them the space they need to think differently. There was a

time where training was used as a treat or a reward, it made people feel valued and recognised for their contribution. For the programmes that matter, consider lavishing the learning with a bit of luxury, to create a “pick me!” dynamic.

*Recognise and reward learning - including certification:* If people feel they are gaining something tangible out of the learning - something for themselves, for their careers as well as something that adds to their social or career capital - they will be more likely to prioritise it. Consider offering learning that comes with a credible, recognised, industry accreditation, helping employees see learning as a personal gain, not just something their manager tells them to do.

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*Create dedicated time for learning:* Time out of your day-to-day work must be made up elsewhere - there is no side-stepping that. If you take people out for a day, they will have a day's worth of work to catch up on. But by formally blocking out time on the calendar and giving people permission to take time out of their roles to develop themselves, leaders are sending a strong message that learning is a strategic priority. Some companies such as Google even give employees dedicated development time and they are very much encouraged to take it. This commitment to nurturing an individual's career development can be a real differentiator for candidates looking for new roles.

*Deliver just in time digital learning - with the right support at the right time:* A bloated Learning Management System full of self-led learning is not the answer to addressing the ennui surrounding L&D. By taking a step back from existing methods and thinking differently about the idea of just in time training, you can pre-empt the needs of your people accurately, giving them the training they need when they need it. For example, that means putting people on management training before they step into a manager role, rather than after they have been struggling.

*Harness collaborative and community learning:* Encourage employees to set up specialist groups on platforms like Yammer where they can share expertise. Think, The Project Managers, The People Managers, The Coding Crew, these communities become places where people can post questions and access the help they need within minutes. Rally some big fish to start posting updates and motivate their team to share the projects they are working on, while they are working on them, so people have the opportunity to offer input and insight. This is how people crowdsource learning in their home lives - on the likes of Facebook or Nextdoor - so the behaviours are usually easily transferred to a work context.

If we are to really address the disconnect between employees of today and L&D we have to look at the broader talent landscape and the changing world of work and reflect this in the learning we offer. Instinctively, people want to learn, but in a way that is more unique than ever. Meeting their specific needs, desires and motivations is essential. Relying on a push strategy is dead. We need to ignite the ‘pull’ in each of our people, by connecting with them as individuals.

#### REFERENCES

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