



Article

Navigating Uncharted Waters - Lesson from Fellow L&D Professionals

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In the most recent IITD event, John Brophy spoke about navigating L&D Through Crisis & Emergency and that the current situation provides a stretch opportunity for L&D professionals. Continuing on the theme of navigation, I thought it would be useful to go back to our panellists from the April IITD event, led by Invisio, and catch up with them as to how they are continually reacting to the evolving situation from the L&D perspective and taking proactive steps for what may lie ahead.

All great Sailors know that whilst we have a destination we are determined to get to, we will have to change course many times as wind, tides and currents try to take us off course. Harsh weather conditions batter our vessel, and we often have to make do with less than perfect – but we learn and adapt and can be stronger for it. Our panellist from the April event, Michael Harmer from Irish Life summed this up when I contacted him recently “Learning can take place in any situation and literally anywhere; key to success is to be more honest and authentic – if it’s not perfect so be it, our intent is not perfection, it’s the learning, and we all know learning can be very messy at times”

Derek Carter of Strong Roots has been navigating through the storm by “sharing articles and videos, having regular, honest conversations and showing authentic vulnerability (balanced with optimism and determination!)” and says this has made things a lot easier, whilst Helen Sayers of the Cooneen Group told me of their induction – a ‘desk in a box’ to help support new employees (at all levels) in understanding their corporate culture, employee brand and the business unit culture and bring this to life. Helen told me how she and her colleagues have been setting existing employees up for success by, building L&D solutions around remote working, understanding (and assessing) training and development needs early before they become performance issues.

The eye of the storm may have passed over, but what of the future as we continue into uncharted waters? Well maybe that’s where our sailing analogy stops; the concept of only one captain of the ship does not translate well going forward. According to Michael Harmer, we need to give more control over to the learner:

“...they can set the time and place the learning can take place, the pace of that learning and the choice of programmes and modes of delivery and rather than immediately looking to us as L&D professionals, we need a much broader reach and need to fully engage and listen. That way we can truly understand the context. Let’s find the audience first and then place our offering in the context of everyday [Irish] Life, addressing the needs and wants directly so that it is even easier to relate to.

We need to address how we interact with our peers for just-in-time learning and understand how new skills can be acquired quickly”

Derek Carter adds “be ready to flex on the what and how of your offering when we return to work... the ones who adapt will thrive. And the best way to be able to do this is to stay in close contact with your internal stakeholders and ‘customers’ as we move towards a widespread return to work.”

To add to the point of giving more control to learners, Michael helpfully shares his 5C’s – he suggests we make learning

- Context Driven – go where the business is at
- Convenient – there at the moment of need
- Current – the right tools to do the job
- Connected - linking learning with real time, daily challenges and live activities and projects
- Clever – insightful, provocative and challenging

Derek says, “people have now largely gotten over the novelty of WFH and are trying to overcome the challenges of their particular situation, rather than getting to grips with the shared, big-picture challenges.” Similarly, Helen explains how remote and self-managed learning (factory and homebased) is more challenging than anticipated due to issues such as poor Wi-Fi, childcare challenges, and finding the right

platforms. Derek described to me how short, informal coaching conversations have been vital for helping support colleagues.

For some organisations, the genie is out of the bottle when it comes to WFH and new ways of learning. According to Derek, with shifts in HR, employment and work practices in the weeks and months ahead he stresses that “line managers will really need to be clued in so they can play their part.” Helen supports this, adding the need for L&D to prioritise the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of colleagues. She adds “teams and individuals will not perform to their best when they are worried about job losses, finances, childcare. The use of L&D for engagement, employee confidence and cultural alignment for new and existing employees needs to sit alongside change management and learning new skills”. Michael adds, “I’ve had a concern that we could over-digitise the digital experience – and lose the meaning of what we do along the way. Our challenge is to keep the human front and centre.”

As with any economic shock, pressure will mount on support functions to cut costs and demonstrate ROI and in this regard L&D may be particularly vulnerable. Michael explains how L&D professionals play a big part in helping to future-proof the business by staying ahead of the curve on any skills that are shifting or understanding how business operations may be changing” and goes on to say, “we need to be transparent about what we deliver and speak to the Top Team in their language, with business driven metrics”. He cautions “we need to address the elephant in the room, that it’s not really what employees don’t know that’s the issue, more what they know and choose not to act on”.

In the panel event in April, and in our subsequent conversations, Derek stressed the need for L&D professional to “understand the commercials and the business issues, both macro and micro... what are the levers that can be pulled to help achieve the new targets and financials in place?”. Michael adds, “We need to show how we can play a big part in helping to future-proof the business by staying ahead of the curve on any skills that are shifting or understanding how business operations may be changing”. According to Derek “it’s our skillset that businesses and our colleagues need now more than ever. So, don’t squander the opportunity to really have an impact and prove your worth!!”

Interested in unleashing potential in your people as we navigate uncharted waters – Pop me a mail, join the conversation on LinkedIn or say hello at the next IITD event.

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