Institute of Leadership: Developing Leaders in the Digital Age

Peter Senge planted the seeds that it was possible to have 'learning organisations' where people 'continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire…' Yet to date, there is doubt whether there are truly learning organisations anywhere.

In 2013, the Leader Challenge Survey for Europe ranked human capital and developing and retaining top talent, as the most difficult challenge organisations face. While, McKinsey & Company argue that active career development is one of the top ways to gain employee engagement as well as attract and retain high potential employees.

There are other reasons too for creating a learning culture. After several articles in Harvard Business Review on derailment a global study found two key de-railers that result in professionals failing. The first is over dependence on a single skill and the second is key skill deficiencies. Therefore the challenge is how to deliver meaningful development affordably that enhances on-going initiatives. A large part of this is to encourage employees to take charge of their own development and shift away from regarding development as a one-time skill enhancement process. Employee development should be long-term, organisation-wide and sustainable. This way, organisations are creating a culture around learning and development and getting closer to Senge's learning organisation.

For effective employee development the process should be easy to use, convenient and driven by individuals interested in improving themselves. The time is right to use creative solutions in a digital age. These solutions can also be a great boost to productivity. The research showed that 79% of employees said they would feel more motivated if their organisation had access to cutting-edge development techniques rather than training courses. The right digital learning platform will develop wide –reaching capabilities such as problem solving, resilience and leading others while assessment tools give valuable feedback**. Digital learning is much more than just watching an online video.**

Most importantly, digital development isn't just a virtual exercise; it's designed to put new capabilities into action immediately. When users apply what they have learned to real world situations, their line managers/senior officers can ascertain their ability to succeed them. Likewise, it's not enough to just read a chapter from a book; learning leadership by doing is the most effective way. Digital development tools help bridge the gap between theory and practice, between understanding a concept and actually applying it. Nowhere is this more true than in the learning and practice of leadership.

By giving individual employees a means for self-improvement, organisations can create a culture of learning necessary for a fast changing world and enhance the collective capability and productivity of the output. They will also gain loyalty and a sustainable leadership pipeline into the next generation.