Learning new skills during work hours, and how to keep learning

Jenny Kim Doan

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Introduction

This research document details how employees can be stimulated to learn new skills during company hours, and what can be done to maintain that habit.

Research question

How can employees be stimulated to focus on learning new skills during work hours, and how to uphold that habit for the long- term?

Why should employees learn new skills and why?

In a constantly changing world of automatization and globalisation, it is very important to keep learning new, relevant skills to not lag behind the competition. Because of this, it's actually necessary to keep improving as to not keep old skills that will go redundant and obsolete overtime.

Some professions even require people to redevelop their skills. For example, software engineers have to redevelop their skills every 12-18 months, because the programming landscape is changing very fast with new technologies and languages.

Employees who have a positive job training are also shown to have a higher job satisfaction, as it gives them purpose and a sense of accomplishment.

There are lots of companies that offer on-the-job training (OTJ) for newcomers to get the work experience hands-on. Though lot of times, that's the only relevant training employees receive about work. According to research, about 42% of millennials are considering leaving their job because they don't believe they're learning enough or at the pace that they should be in order to keep up with the rest of the competitive business world.

Often, employers have to use their free time before or after work to learn new skills. This requires commitment and energy of the person learning, which can be exhausting especially after work.

Source: https://www.developgoodhabits.com/continuous-learning/

How to stimulate employees to learn new skills?

It depends if employees are granted time for studying during work hours.

Some companies offer training to further develop new skills or learn new ones, which is the best way to learn as it allows up-to-training and communication between other employees. New skills are often taught if it needs to be used for a new assignment/ project.

Some big companies at Silicon Valley like Google and Apple, encourage employees to use 20% of their workweek to work on personal projects. This allows for more motivation and engagement from employees and might even get other people interested in working in the project. Downside of it, is that is utilizes paid workhours that doesn't go into the product the company itself is doing.

This is why it is important that it's clear for everyone beforehand what needs to be done for work, so that there may be some time left to do personal projects. This would then need to be discussed with employers first.

If a new project comes up, some extra information outside of the company's knowledge may be needed. Employees may then also collaboratively learn about the new technology required about it by doing research on it or learning from someone. The information gathered may then be used for other future projects, or even applied in the company itself.

Source: https://lifehacker.com/how-can-i-learn-a-new-skill-at-my-boring-job-5982437

https://twitter.com/TessFerrandez/status/1423909187768160259

How to uphold the learning habit over the long-term?

It depends about the methods the company uses to make employees learn new skills. One thing that remains constant is the retaining the motivation of the employees to learn new skills. If one is allowed to work on personal projects on the rest of the workhours, then they would have to do it themselves. This is unless the project involves multiple people, which stimulates communication and engagement with other people. Encouraging to do fun, personal projects with multiple people in the company can be a way to keep learning.

When researching about a new technology, it can be very helpful to learn about it with other people. This can be done with asking questions, compiling research documents or doing tech-talks with each other.

If the company offers training and materials like workshops to learn new skills, then it's important to get engagement from the employees. Unfortunately, only about 12% of employees apply what they've learnt into their workflow. This is why it's important to keep the training ongoing and engaging, by listening to the employees' needs and improvement points, and looking into what they like.

Source: https://360learning.com/blog/training-engagement/

Conclusion

There are various methods to stimulate learning new skillsets for employees at a company. Possible methods include:

- Letting employees dedicate to their personal project for 20% of their workweek, or when the tasks are done
- Learning about new technology together for (business) projects
- Company offering training and workshops

Aside from learning new skills, the method also has to be engaging to actually be used into the workflow. This can be done by learning together with other people or listening to the needs of the employees' and what they would like to learn.