



## A United Front: How Learning Teams and Managers Can Work Together to Win the War for Talent

### Description

Employee turnover rates are up and predicted to continue rising significantly worldwide. Globally, average employee turnover rates are predicted to rise from 20.6% in 2012 to 23.4% by 2018 as economic conditions improve—representing some 192 million separations ([HayGroup and the Centre for Economics and Business Research](#)). The number of departures in 2018 will stand at almost 4.7 million in the UK alone.

The Hay Group research revealed that confidence in leadership, opportunity for career development, autonomy, supportive work environments, and appropriate compensation are among the most consistent predictors of employee engagement and commitment. In a [2016 Gallup poll](#) in the US, 87% of Millennials said that development is important for them in a job. In fact, [Forbes](#) stated that advancement and development were fourth on the list of what people want from their employers in the US. Those coming in first, second, and third were money, health insurance, and work/life balance.

### Changing the Psychological Contract

Gallup's 2016 poll reminds us that the performance challenge of the 21st century is the fact that 87% of employees are not engaged, or are actively disengaged, in their jobs. That means we only have 13% of employees who are completely psychologically committed to their jobs.

With increasingly competitive markets, a turbulent economic environment, and the growth of globalization, the psychological contract between employers and employees is now very different from what it once was. Most employees are no longer looking for a job for life. Redundancy is a reality. It's easier, and often expected, for new talent to move from job to job. Some employees actively seek short-term careers in different organizations with the expectation that they will develop some experience and move on from jobs that are not satisfying or that have provided them with a steppingstone to further opportunities elsewhere. With all of these variables and challenges, it's no wonder managers find it increasingly difficult to create environments that motivate and engage everyone in their team.

And yet, many of the Learning & Development (L&D) teams I support tell me it's the managers who just aren't doing the job they need to do. While engagement is a manager's responsibility, and evidence does suggest that some people leave jobs because of their managers, L&D teams, talent teams, and OD teams all need to change the way they work in order to do more to engage and retain individuals on behalf of the organization.

## **Learning and Development Isn't Just for New Hires**

For individuals joining a company at the start of their career, learning and development are a given. In fact, organizations compete for new talent by trying to offer the most engaging, structured, and rewarding learning and development program. New graduates expect to be developed. They see development as part of the package, and they will scrutinize what's offered. They also expect their managers to play an active role in their learning, set expectations, and provide feedback. Still, organizations are not proactive enough in utilizing the power of learning and development as a retention tool for all employees.

## **Learning Needs to Be Strategically and Collaboratively Focused**

To be engaged, individuals need to know that they are growing in a direction that services themselves and the organization. To achieve this, we must get better at uniting what are still very separate activities in the business. Managers and Human Resources (HR) need to be much more connected; we need true partnerships between managers and HR colleagues to engage and retain the workforce. And within HR, we see the same disconnect.

Aligning learning and development to the strategic goals of the organization can make learning more meaningful and powerful in its ability to support organizational success. By engaging the people who lead the company, we can develop a true understanding of the knowledge, skills, and capabilities that are important to the business. If L&D professionals don't have access to those leading the organization, how can they, and the employees they serve, know that the development they are providing is adding value? Managers will support their teams spending time learning if they see there is a tangible connection between that time spent and the performance of the individual and the organization.

## **A More Flexible, Self-Directed Approach to Learning**

Aligning learning to the culture of the organization is critical. If a business offers flexibility to employees in how they work and focuses more on the career paths available within the company, learning should

reflect this culture too. Learning academies that give employees the bigger picture of how their learning will support their career and where that learning will come from are crucial. We need to move away from “course catalogs,” and toward defining and pursuing learning opportunities specific to roles. The rise of self-directed learning and learning playbooks bring a different, more individually tailored approach to that employee’s learning journey, enabling them to see how learning is embedded in everything they do within the organization.

But are L&D teams keeping up with what learners actually want?

Many organizations still see learning as a *need to have*, and have thrown themselves down the e-learning route to ensure that a consistent message can be scaled to a broad audience. However, unless e-learning is designed as a solution to increase performance or to affect a change, by using models such as the Stages of Change ([Prochaska & Diclemente](#)), it just gives us information. It does not, in itself, create behavior change or increase performance.

Are L&D pros tracking how effective their learning solutions are at influencing the performance of the individual or organization?

I often have conversations with clients about the need to save money, use the training budget smarter, or reduce the time away from the desks. Not many of those conversations focus on how people prefer to learn and what learning methods work best. In the [CIPD 2016 Employee Outlook Survey](#), for example, coaching was seen as most useful by employees. Yet only 9% of employees said they had received coaching in the 12 months prior to the survey. Learning from peers through social networking and mentoring was seen by 95% of those surveyed as most useful. With the Baby Boomers exiting organizations in large numbers, mentoring across the generations will ensure knowledge and value are captured and retained within organizations.

## **Partnering to Win the War for Talent**

Managers play a critical role in engaging, retaining, and developing employees as organizations move to learning frameworks like 70:20:10, where individuals are told that most of their learning will come from on-the-job opportunities. If these cultures are to be successful, managers need the tools to take on their new roles effectively and successfully. L&D needs to focus on this audience as part of their wider learning team. Managers know their people. They know where their retention issues might be, what motivates the individuals in their teams, and what their career aspirations are. How flexible can L&D and HR be to support managers in retaining those people who add the most value to the organization? Many managers cite strict processes and boundaries as huge barriers to engagement. Are the HR and L&D teams listening?

HR, and particularly L&D, can be incredibly important to the engagement and retention of employees. But they have to join hands with their colleagues, truly partner with managers, and focus on creating a learning culture that gives individuals a reason to want to stay.

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### **Author**

brian-kikkert