



Invest in Learning & Development to Recover After COVID-19

Description

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In an earlier [article](#), I wrote about the probable damage we have caused to the psychological contract between our businesses and our employees.

Short-sighted leaders are likely to have dismissed my thoughts as fluffy nonsense; for them, cash is king. “Cash is what we should be looking after,” they’d say. And of course, they are right, to a point.

More enlightened leaders may have joined me in beginning to plan how to restore the trust and confidence of their people. Mutual trust and confidence will be key to the fast rebuilding of a dynamic culture that leads to productivity, discretionary effort, and commercial engagement behind the common strategic direction of travel.

Some of the more spreadsheet-orientated leaders may sit up when they see their very best people leave for the competition, or, even worse, just leave. Departure without a destination is the action that indicates no greater dissatisfaction. Some organizations will be targeting your business and your treasure trove of talent and expertise. I’ll let you into a secret—I am!

So, my premise is: don’t cut your L&D budgets—double them, triple them! And then develop and execute a meaningful learning strategy that delivers organizational and cultural values— real and visible impact to the business beyond the obvious improvement and transference of skills and behaviors.

Be imaginative. Be commercially focused. Don’t just spend—invest. Invest in tailored and company-wide learning as one of the most potent weapons in your COVID-19 emergence armory.

Why We Should Be Spending More on Training If We Want to Hit the Ground Running after COVID-19

Imagine how it must feel to return to work after three months or more on furlough, a period of enormous stress, where work was far from the top of your priorities.

The effect of these experiences will be felt in all businesses who used the scheme and many who didn't but had long periods of remote working imposed on them. We will have to remake the professional relationships that teamwork relies upon and that enable an organization to function effectively—reactivating our people towards a new normal.

Performance = Motivation x Ability

We could be witnessing the greatest natural experiment in skills fade and the evaporation of normal human interaction. As the UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak commented, "...sitting there on furlough ... means their skills fade."

In 1885, Hermann Ebbinghaus formulated the concept of the forgetting curve. In simple terms, we lose the memory of learned knowledge unless that learned knowledge is consciously reviewed time and again. It's clear that many people returning from furlough will, at best, need to refresh their skills. More likely, they'll need to relearn many of them.

Add to that an experience of having your salary cut, your colleagues gone, and, as I have already referred to, the psychological contract damaged, and it becomes clear we risk inefficiency, incompetence, and, in many cases, barely concealed resentment.

My best people are wanted, and they are mobile; losing them would damage my business and set back our plans to emerge from this crisis stronger than ever. I have tried to lead them well, but I am sure I have let them down at times. I have made them work remotely. They have had their pay reduced. I know that some will be considering a change of working environment.

Let's be real, I am not in a position to offer salary increases that would chain them to their laptops. In any case, perhaps money alone is not the best salve. In terms of recognition for their service, and as a gesture of their value to me and my care for them, which dollar delivers more value: a nominal pay rise, or a fantastic tailored, personalized, innovative learning program that will benefit them and our business?

Rebuild social capital.

Training does not only deliver skills and knowledge development; training develops interpersonal relationships, a common language, a common sense of understanding and group identity, shared norms and values of trust, co-operation, and reciprocity. As such, it is:

- A vehicle to bring about cultural assimilation: "how we do things around here"

- A channel to communicate the organization’s priorities and ethos: “who we are and what we stand for”
- An employee brand experience created by a company to influence the feelings that an employee has about the organization. Connecting and engaging at an emotional level helps create “converts,” and encourages brand awareness and organizational loyalty
- A means of encouraging staff engagement and retention

Learning is a means of aligning behind a common goal—in cases of crisis or setback, to realign and reignite the business.

There are many ways learning can be designed and delivered to do this, but there are a few principles that can be useful in thinking about how to leverage learning to develop social capital:

- Provide the opportunity to be a part of something new and exciting
- Position the development as help and support, not as testing and assessment
- Involve the learners in the design and development where you can
- Include the learner’s line manager in the learning process
- Make sure the learning is properly socialized and given overt senior-level advocacy
- Use coaches, mentors, and/or “buddies” to provide personal and professional relationships that accelerate learning and support team working habits.

Oh, and they’ll also learn some new skills. So, take the opportunity now to invest in helping your people refresh what they know, relearn what they’ve forgotten, and reignite your business.

Ready to see how you can meet your organization’s learning and development needs? [Learn more](#) about the unique digital learning environment of [Kaplan Performance Academy](#).

Date Created

July 2020

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