LEARNING IN THE FLOW OF WORK:

How to incorporate training into the work day and improve employee performance

R rise up

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Introduction

The world of work has undergone an **unprecedented transformation** since the start of the pandemic in Spring 2020. Despite the initial challenges of shifting from office-based to flexible, remote working, the most successful companies have been the ones willing to embrace change, enhancing their resilience and adaptability in the process.

In this post-Covid landscape, the old adage of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" couldn't be more out of place. For decades, businesses operated in a fairly straightforward economic context, responding to consumer demand for goods and services and striving to maintain their market share. But in the last two decades, the rate of technological progress has completely shaken up traditional business models. Simply doing what you did yesterday isn't enough: more than being responsive, companies have to **anticipate** future trends and be ready to **adapt** to future challenges.

The key to this is adopting a **learning culture**. Rather than cherry-picking talent from elsewhere to respond to skills shortages, companies need to be proactive in developing the skills of their employees to maintain business performance. And with most businesses stating that they plan to permanently adopt a hybrid working model post pandemic, it's hardly surprising that the **digital learning** market is booming.

When we say "digital learning", we aren't talking about going back to the days of doing bulky e-learning courses on a PC. According to research conducted by Fosway, 84% of learning and development leaders consider it important to integrate digital learning into other corporate platforms like Microsoft Teams. In other words, having recognised the importance of collaboration when working remotely in a virtual team, companies are seeing the value in **learning in the flow of work**.

01.

What is learning in the flow of work?

The origin of the LIFOW concept

In 2018, learning industry expert Josh Bersin wrote a seminal article in which he explained how learning in the flow of work (LIFOW) was set to represent a paradigm shift for corporate training.

Crucially, Bersin makes an important distinction between the consumer content design model and the corporate content design model. While consumer content platforms like Netflix aim to encourage their subscribers to consume as much content as possible, the exact opposite is true for corporate content providers – but why?

According to research conducted by LinkedIn Learning, the number one learning and development challenge for companies is the **lack of time available for training**. Given that the average employee only has **24 minutes a week** to spare for formal learning, it's hardly surprising that companies don't want their employees to spend all day glued to training content! In this sense, an ideal corporate training model is one that provides employees with the exact information they need to become better at their jobs as quickly and effectively as possible. As Bersin puts it, "this approach is what people want", and LIFOW is an ideal solution because it provides learners with digestible and relevant tips, recommendations and suggestions as they work.
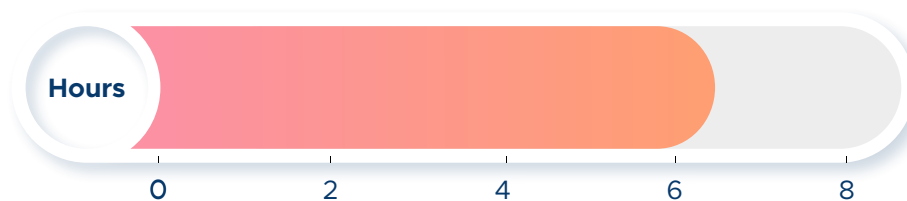
Defining LIFOW

So, what exactly is learning in the flow of work? LIFOW is undertaking training as you work, without having to stop what you are doing. It aims to **integrate training seamlessly into your working day** so that learning becomes part of your workflow. At this stage, it's worth pausing for a second and considering what workflows actually look like for the average knowledge worker.

Time spent by the average office worker per task:

In meetings
14%

Gathering informations
19%

Responding to emails
28%

Other
39%
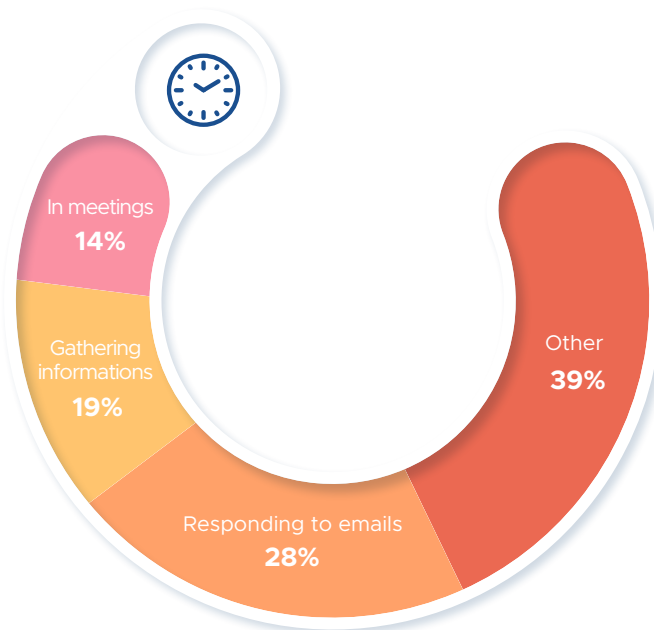
Time spent by the average office worker sitting in front of a computer per day:

Hours

0   2   4   6   8

Source: **Harvard Business Review**

As these graphics show, knowledge workers spend an awful lot of time (6.5 hours a day, in fact!) finding information and passing it on to others in various formats, be it via email, in meetings or in document format. LIFOW recognizes that for learning to be effective, it needs to be aligned to modern ways of working.

What does LIFOW look like?

Case study: Financial analyst

Let's say that a financial analyst working remotely is putting together some figures in Excel for an important client.

A competent financial analyst, they are confident that the figures are correct and have a good idea of how best to present them to the client, using relevant charts and tables.

However, they usually prepare this data for internal use only, and don't have much experience creating visually appealing graphics.

How can they bridge their knowledge gap and learn how to make their work look more attractive ahead of the presentation later that day?

Pre-pandemic, they could have just approached a colleague and asked for help, but remote working makes it much harder to orchestrate these on-the-job moments.

They could enrol themselves on an online or in-person course, but while this could be handy for the future, it won't solve their immediate learning need.

They could scour their organisation's collaborative platform (e.g., SharePoint) in search of some relevant content, but the chances are, they probably won't find exactly what they need.

A specific Google search might help them to find content a bit closer to what they need, but it can be time consuming to find a quality video or tutorial from a trusted source.

With **learning in the flow of work,** there's no need to do any of this. That's because you can simply open up your organisation's collaborative tool, such as Microsoft Teams, ask the AI chatbot for help with Excel design and it will suggest ultra-tailored, short-form content. This might be a quick video tutorial, an infographic or a link to the company's style and design guide. In other words, you can learn as you work and find the exact materials you need.

LIFOW: a top priority for L&D leaders

According to the L&D Dashboard produced by the Learning and Performance Institute, learning in the flow of work represents one of the top challenges for learning leaders for 2021–2022. In particular, L&D leaders are faced with **engaging** employees so that they don't see learning as an interruption and **motivating** them to incorporate regular learning into their work routines.

THE LIFOW FORMULA

ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring that employees don't see learning as an interuption

Learning in the work of flow

MOTIVATION

Ensuring that employees incorporate regular learning into their work routines
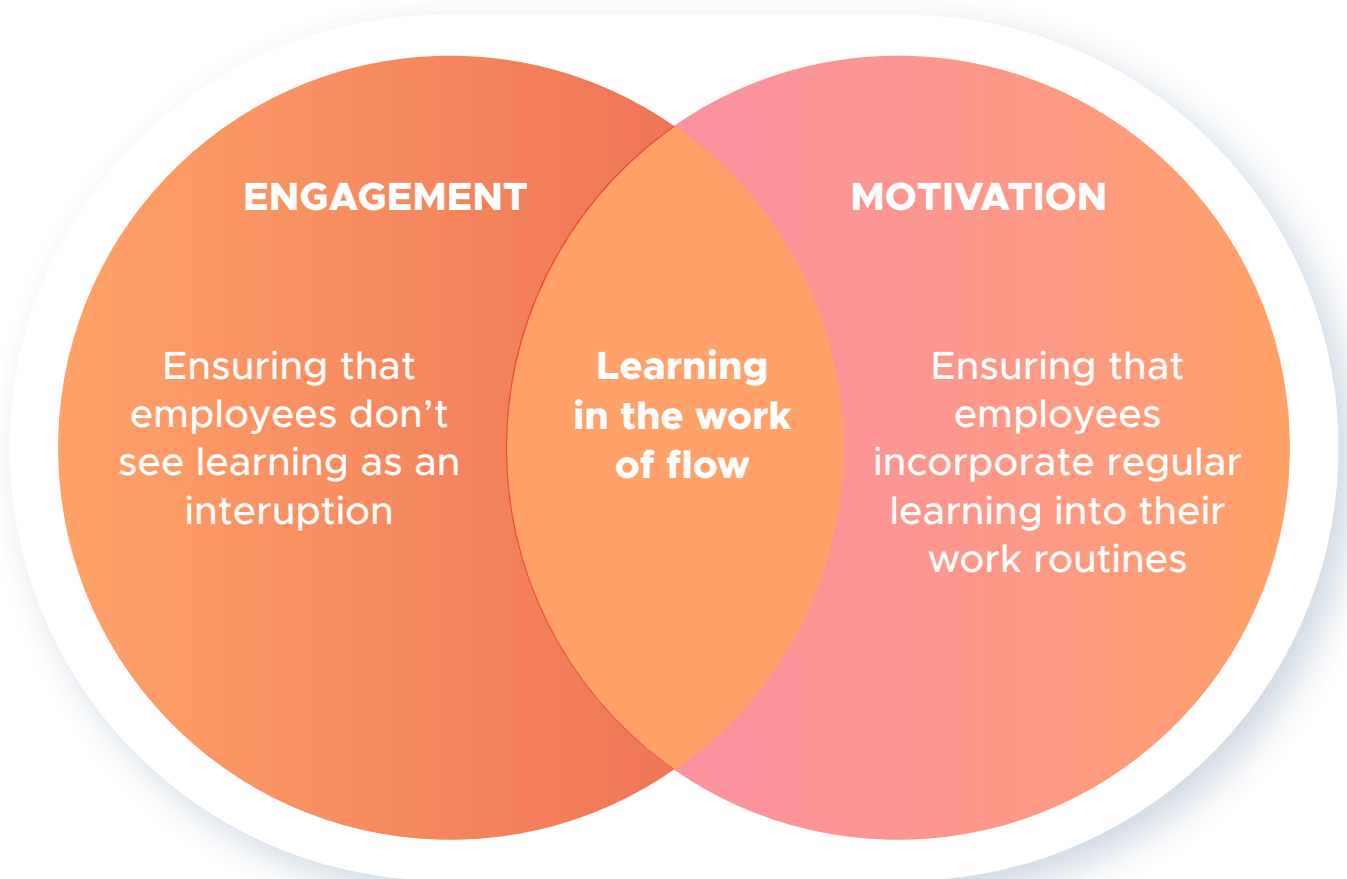
02.

Why learning
in the flow of work?

The evolution of corporate training

It's worth tracing the evolution of corporate training over the past few decades to really understand how LIFOW has developed – and why it's the future.

1980s

In the early days, training content could only be run on a single PC, which made it difficult to track learners' progress. However, with the emergence of PC networking, a technology known as SCORM was eventually developed, which enabled e-learning content to be stored and monitored.

1990s

As technology advanced, companies began developing their own learning portals, which over time became integrated talent management suites.

1998

The year that Google was born. This could have had a major impact on corporate training, given that Google is one of the earliest examples of a learning in the flow of work platform, but companies at the time were sidetracked by developing their own corporate talent programmes.

2000s

Many companies focused on building integrated talent management suites, but a technological revolution was simultaneously under way; YouTube, Twitter and the iPhone were all launched within three years of one another (in 2005, 2006, and 2007 respectively), changing the way we interacted with content.

Early 2010s

LMS platforms began to be repositioned as experience platforms (LXPs), and many start-ups saw the potential for innovation in the learning space.

Late 2010s

Digital learning gave impetus to the development of microlearning, where learners could access useful, specific, short-from content from anywhere and at any time.

2020s

We're now seeing a shift towards adaptive learning tools, which suggest content based on user behaviour and preferences, and learning in the flow of work, which is aimed at providing learners with exactly the information they need on demand as they work.

	1980s	1990s	2000s	Early 2010s	Late 2010s	Now
	PC-based training	E-learning and blended learning	Talent management	Continuous learning	Digital learning	**Learning in the flow of work**
System	Pre-LMS	LMS as an e-learning platform	LMS as a talent platform	LMS as an experience platform	LMS as an omnipresent platform	**LMS as an intuitive platform**
Learning method	PC-based	Self-study, online learning	Career focused, lots of topics	Learning on demand, embedded learning	Accesible from anywhere, at any time, by anyone	**Learning as you work (learning working)**
Learning format	CD-based	Course catalogues	Career-based learning paths	Videos, short-form content, mobile apps	Microlearning, real-time virtual courses	**Integrated learning apps**

Content adapted from research by josh Bersin

The challenges of learning in the flow of work

The importance of digitalisation

Before rolling out learning in the flow of work across an organisation, an important pre-requisite is digitalising workstreams and training courses.

In other words, an organisation's learning culture should be grounded in the use of digital tools and new remote teaching methods, such as **mobile learning** (learning on the go from your mobile or tablet) and **social learning** (learning from peers and colleagues). Learning in the flow of work also goes hand in hand with **adaptive learning**, which makes use of AI to deliver ultra-personalised content.

Some key considerations

Provided that an organisation has an established digitalised learning culture, there are a few things to consider when adopting learning in the flow of work.

Have an easy-to-use corporate knowledge system
To ensure that employees can find the right content, it needs to be correctly tagged. Content also needs to be refreshed regularly to ensure that it remains relevant.

Enable content to be shared internally
Ideally, you want to ensure that the learning points acquired in one area of the business can be shared widely across the organisation, such as through a collaborative tool or forum.

Make use of APIs
Having integrated technologies can help to connect learners to relevant content, offering a highly rich training experience.

Integrate a chat function
Adding a conversational interface to your workflow software is a great way to combine learning and work, enabling learners to view and share content.

Have a channel dedicated to learning
With a dedicated online learning space, learners will feel encouraged to post and share content, which will help to embed a learning culture across the organisation.

7 benefits of learning in the flow of work

1. It fosters increased productivity and performance

A key benefit of LIFOW is that employees can use the 'dead time' that arises during their work day and fill it with meaningful training. Whereas they might have got stuck on something in the past and wasted time wondering how to overcome it, they can benefit from highly personalised training with LIFOW and acquire the knowledge they need instantaneously (e.g., for an urgent task). What's more, better trained employees are more likely to perform their job well and encounter less work-related stress.

2. It is a seamless and flexible solution

Learning in the flow of work integrates seamlessly into day-to-day work schedules and can be adapted to each employee's training needs. In addition, it's quick to do and can be scaled up or down, depending on how busy or free employees are, making it much more flexible than scheduled, in-person training courses.

3. It drives learner engagement

Because it responds to a specific and immediate need, this kind of training is great at engaging and motivating employees. Moreover, employees get to choose what they want to learn and when, giving them complete autonomy. This means that learners are more likely to get exactly what they need out of the training.

4. It empowers and enables employees to reduce time-to-skill

Learning in the flow of work gives employees greater accountability, enabling them to upskill in the areas that they feel are most beneficial. Gone are the days of the teacher-student hierarchy: employees become valued and equal partners in the learning process and not only learn new skills more quickly but share their knowledge with others.

5. It has a measurable impact

Because the lessons learned can be implemented straight away, learners can see first-hand the tangible impact that LIFOW training has on their day-to-day work. What's more, this creates a positive feedback loop: the more they learn, the better their performance and the more they want to continue learning new skills.

6. It fosters meaningful connections

It's worth remembering that while LIFOW does benefit each individual employee, it also helps to instil a learning culture across the organisation in which each employee is encouraged to share useful resources via collaborative tools such as Slack, Teams or Trello.

7. It's what employees want

Perhaps the most important benefit is that the modern employee wants and expects to be given training opportunities. Ever wondered what the number one reason is for quitting a job? The answer is a lack of scope for learning and development, with one in five employees citing this as their reason for leaving.
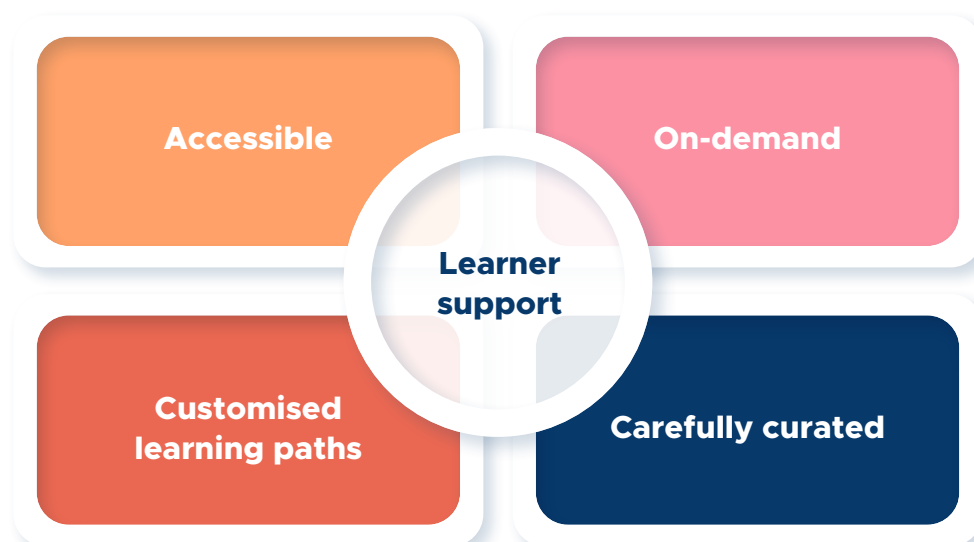
03.

Adapting training to learning in the flow of work

Core design principles for LIFOW

When it comes to putting LIFOW in practice, there are a few core design pillars to bear in mind.

Highly **accessible** learning content means that employees can access and consume content easily, wherever they are.

On-demand consumption – from anywhere, at any time and from any device – can be achieved by incorporating responsive designs into course modules.

Customised learning paths ensure that each learner has the ability to choose what they want to learn (learning materials) and how (learning format). For example, it might be worth assessing employees' preferred learning styles and then offering content in the right format. Visual learners will learn best when information is presented through infographics and graphs, while verbal learners will find it useful to talk things through.

Carefully curated content designed in line with learner objectives is the best way to ensure that the training being offered to employees is relevant and meaningful.

Learner support

The glue which holds these pillars together is undoubtedly learner support. While LIFOW might seem like a miracle solution, we all know that relying on technology alone isn't enough. It might be that, in the initial stages of a LIFOW solution, the training being suggested to employees isn't quite right. Sure, they might be able to react to the content with a thumbs up or thumbs down in the app and provide feedback via the chat function, but there needs to be adequate support structures in place for hybrid learners. This could be having a dedicated training coordinator within your organisation who is on hand to answer any queries or making time in team meetings to discuss how learners are finding this new way of learning.

Strategies for enabling LIFOW

> With those design principles in mind, here are some learning strategies that are best suited to LIFOW.

Mobile learning

This allows learners to adapt training to their busy schedules, providing short-form, mobile-friendly content available via an app, for example. This might entail doing a quick mobile quiz during a coffee break or watching a short training video during the daily commute.

Microlearning

Ideal for learning at the point of need, microlearning involves providing the learner with small chunks of information during sessions of 10 minutes or less. This could be as simple as pop-up hints while using a piece of software, brief interactive videos or handy infographics.

User-generated content

Circulating content created by employees themselves enables other employees – sometimes working in an entirely different department or office – to tap into the expertise and experience of their peers. One example is employee blog posts which, based on their keywords, can be automatically suggested to colleagues working in a relevant subject area.

Rise Up Microsoft Teams app

Perhaps the embodiment of LIFOW is integrating learning into a collaborative tool. That's exactly what the Rise Up app for Microsoft Teams does – meaning that users can learn without exiting the Teams app.

04.

**Rise Up
& Microsoft Teams**

Introducing the Rise Up app for MS Teams

With the Rise Up app for Microsoft Teams, training just became part of the work day!

Convinced of the benefits that LIFOW can bring, Rise Up has developed a Microsoft Teams integration tool, a learning app specifically designed to address the challenges of learning in the flow of work.

Employees can now complete training modules without having to exit the Teams app. As long as they are logged in to Teams, they can access their training courses and view tailored content via the app. Learners can also access progress tests, all from the Teams platform.

With the Rise Up application for Microsoft Teams, employees benefit from a **personalised learning solution** thanks to Lia, a virtual training coach, who is on hand to provide training-related support. Powered by artificial intelligence technology, Lia adapts to the specific needs of each employee. The online coach can provide meaningful **responses to user questions, recommend content** and **send notifications and reminders** directly within Teams.

A solution designed with LIFOW in mind

With the Rise Up app, learners benefit from **true autonomy.** They get to have a say in the pace and purpose of their training and can locate the exact resources that they need. Resources are designed to perfectly adapt to the app, and Rise Up offers a large number of microlearning modules which are both engaging and informative.

Moreover, the learning app in Microsoft Teams is highly **collaborative,** meaning that users can undertake training while staying connected to their peers. They can even interact with their colleagues and undertake training without having to miss a calendar notification.

To ensure that users can access the interface instantaneously and enjoy an enhanced navigation experience, the Rise Up application for Microsoft Teams incorporates a **single sign-on** user matching system. This means that, once signed in to Teams, employees don't have to sign in a second time to access the Rise Up application.

Simply put, Rise Up and Microsoft Teams are offering a **new way of learning,** enabling employees to benefit from **professional development** and organisations to achieve **enhanced competitiveness.**

Key features

Let's take a closer look at the functionalities offered by the Rise Up app for Microsoft Teams.

RISE UP FOR APP MS TEAMS:
KEY FEATURES

Seamless SSO
- No need to log in twice
- No need to use multiple tabs

Take training courses within teams
- Familiar interface
- Increases courses sign-ups
- Reduces "dead-time" and keep employees online

Collaborative learning functionalities
- Efficient, peer-to-peer learning experience

Set your status to "busy" while learning
- Learners can block out distractions

Real-time progress stats for managers
- Instant feedback on learners and ability to send training reminders
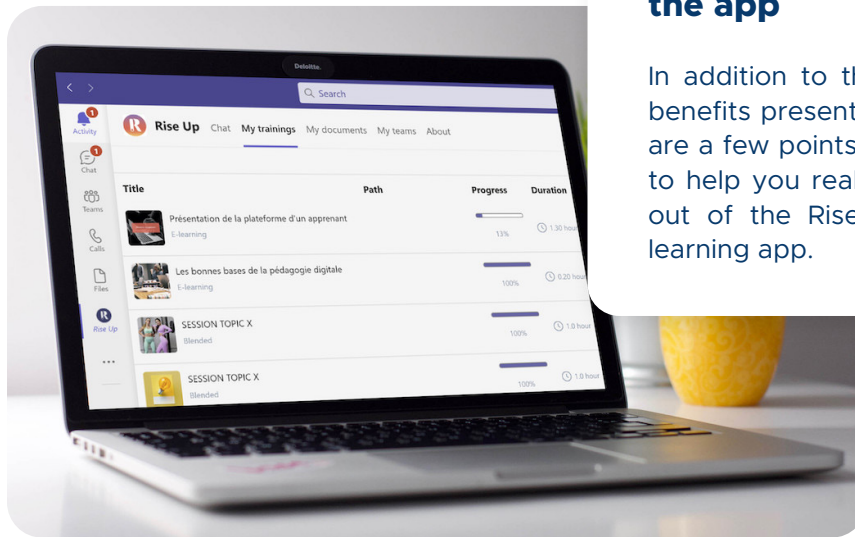
My documents tab
- Easy access to most-used documents

AI responses, reminders and suggestions
- Seamless support within the app, enhancing learners engagement

The evolution of corporate training

Getting the most out of the app

In addition to the features and benefits presented above, there are a few points to bear in mind to help you really get the most out of the Rise Up integrated learning app.

--- Use microlearning ---

Break down training courses into short modules for enhanced engagement.

--- Power up your learning platform ---

The app should complement your Web platform rather than replacing it altogether, so make sure your learning platform offers meaningful, varied and customised content that you can be proud of.

--- Keep your learners on track ---

Enabling automated and manual calendar reminders, as well as easy access to training and live sessions, can help keep your learners engaged with their learning goals.

--- Encourage collaboration ---

Encourage employees to make the most of the collaborative features of the Rise Up & Microsoft Teams app.

Case study: Akka Technologies

Akka is a leading engineering and technology consultancy with expertise in a wide range of sectors, including energy, aerospace, telecoms and life sciences. It employs 21,000 people in more than 20 countries across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and North and South America. The company has a dedicated training division (the Akkademy), which facilitates employee skills development.

The problem

Akka wanted to improve the uptake of its training programmes and enhance learner engagement. One of the biggest challenges for learning and development professionals is that many employees don't have the time or desire to learn. As soon as employees fall out of the habit of learning regularly, they start to see training as a burden. Being forced to do mandatory training that they don't necessarily have an interest in further reinforces the negative view that employees can have of corporate training.

The solution

With the Rise Up app, Akka was able to integrate training into employees' day-to-day workstreams, enabling them to train on the job. Employees could access training modules, assessments, certificates and Rise Up's virtual AI-based training coach, Lia, without having to leave the MS Teams app. They also benefited from the app's other features, including being able to set their status as 'busy' (the red dot in Teams) while they were training and being able to share useful resources with their colleagues. Managers, meanwhile, were able to keep track of learner progress.

The impact

The solution was initially tested on a group of 10–15 employees in Belgium and Switzerland before being deployed across the company. This test phase, which lasted for two months, was aimed at ensuring that the tool would respond to employees' needs in real-life working situations.

As all users were already familiar with the Teams platform, the deployment was seamless, and no technical resources were required. Once the IT department had granted users the relevant permissions, they could simply download the Rise Up app for Teams and were logged in automatically thanks to the SSO user matching system.

"

**The feedback was unanimously positive.
Even in the few weeks they had
to test the platform, learners said
that they were actually triggered by
the notifications and that [the training]
was almost normal at the end,
it was part of their environment.**

Nathalie Macq,
Learning Program Manager,
Akka Technologies

Conclusion

The main training challenge faced by companies today is adapting training to their employees' needs – that is, integrating training into their work environment to develop the **training reflex.** In other words, whenever employees encounter a task or challenge that they lack the skills or knowledge to perform, they can meet their learning needs straightaway, wherever they are and whatever device they are using.

This is particularly important in a hybrid context, given that this way of working is here to stay for most of us. It is also important given the seismic shifts under way in the world of work, driven by technology. According to data published by the California Institute of the Future and reported by KPMG, 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 have not yet been created. This will mean that companies and employees will need to upskill incredibly quickly to respond to the fundamental changes coming down the pipeline.

Such changes can instil fear in even the most experienced, adaptable professionals – but they don't need to. With learning in the flow of work, employees can continuously gain the skills and knowledge they lack today and will need tomorrow.

LIFOW is also good news for learning leaders. While the current weaknesses in forward thinking mean that 43% of L&D leaders only become aware of training needs after they are announced by the business, adopting LIFOW can help them to become more proactive, strategic partners by obtaining real-time insight into employee learning patterns, trends and expectations.

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