

Is learning in the flow of work the future of workplace learning?

It's never been easier in all of human history for people to access the information they need. A quick "Ok, Google..." and we have the answers to our questions in a matter of mere seconds.

And not just answers, but content too. Google search a 'how to' question and you'll be presented with no end of step-by-step guides, opinions and videos to help you out.

[A report from Deloitte](#) even found that 70% of workers will use a search engine for answers, as a preference to taking a course at work.

The expectation then is increasingly that people expect answers quickly. And workplace learning should be no different.

But often. It is.

How often are employees left waiting on support tickets or on-hold with website live-chat? How much time and productivity does this cost? And can employees afford to take the time out of their day to take an hour-long training course?

Learning in the flow of work is a practice that can mitigate these issues and bring workplace learning more in line with the age of instant answers that people are used to.

What is learning in the flow of work?

The phrase 'learning in the flow of work' was first coined by [Josh Bersin in 2018](#) and is about making learning on the go more accessible in the workplace.

A [2018 LinkedIn post from Bersin](#) supported the benefits around learning in the flow of work and found that employees who spend time at work learning are 47% less likely to be stressed and 39% more likely to feel productive.

It also found that time is one of the biggest barriers to workplace learning.

It often feels like a choice between work and learning, with traditional learning taking employees away from their desks, or key business tasks, to undertake training.

With Bersin's methodology, the keyword is 'flow.' Learning that doesn't interrupt productivity.

This, however, still doesn't answer the question of what learning in the flow of work is... and what it looks like. On-the-job learning is ever evolving, but usually involves:

1. Self-learning

By its very definition, learning in the flow of work puts the onus on the learner to drive their own development. It's more about choosing when you access learning, rather than being forced to sit through certain courses or training. It's on the employer to make the learning accessible and visible, but it's the responsibility of the employee to interact with that learning.

2. On-demand learning

The benefit of on-demand learning is that it is accessible at any time. With classroom or virtual training, the learner needs to find a set amount of time out of their busy day to take that training. Having a location in your LMS for on-demand learning, relevant to what the employee is working on, allows them to access training when they need it.

3. Software support

From webinars to in-person or virtual inductions and day-long training courses, there are lots of ways to learn a new piece of software. But many people prefer to learn a new tool as they go. This is only possible if the software has an in-depth support system that can help users out if they get stuck. If a business is heavily reliant on cloud software, it may be that a **digital adoption solution** is the tool they need to support learning in the flow of work.

A digital adoption solution acts as an add-on to your software, allowing you to add helpful prompts and tool tips that make it easier to learn new tools. Successfully implementing a digital adoption solution will keep productivity high, as workers don't need to navigate away from a tool to get answers to any questions or blockers.

4. Micro-learning

Whilst macro-learning is about taking hours or days out to learn something new, micro-learning is all about short-sharp learning bursts. This form of learning, whether through short, curated courses or video content is perfect for supporting learning in the flow of work. Weaving micro-learning into your LMS or software systems (using a digital adoption solution) can reduce frustration by giving quick and specific answers to common questions and issues.

5. Targeted learning

Going back to the opening point, when we Google something, we usually want an answer to a specific question. Similarly, learning in the flow of work only works by providing the specific information that people need. The time spent searching for the right information, taking long courses or watching lengthy videos only serves to remove people from the flow of work, rather than supporting them whilst they work.

Learning on the go comes in many forms, but it's absolutely essential for employers to make this learning easily accessible. This has become even more important due to the recent changes in the way people work.

How learning in the flow supports hybrid workers

Businesses are still adapting to the working pattern changes brought on by the pandemic.

Some people might be splitting their time between home and the office, some may be based overseas, and some may work different hours from others. This makes it even more important that learning is accessible and consistent for all.

If someone needs a question answered, but the person with the knowledge has clocked off for the day, there needs to be the right support available.

In simpler times, everyone would probably be in the office, working the same hours. It's easy to lean over to a colleague and ask... "So... how do I do this." You might even be able to train the whole office at the same time with an in-person course in the board room.

To promote learning in the flow of work, there needs to be several layers of support in place:

1. **Communication software:** It should go without saying, but a Microsoft Teams, Slack or Zoom messaging tool is crucial. With group chats, teams are far better equipped to support each other with issues and employees are less likely to suffer in silence.
2. **Digital adoption solutions:** Digital adoption solutions like [Omniplex Guide](#) act as a helping hand to employees while they learn new tools. Omniplex Guide, for example, is a browser extension that runs over the top of your tools, meaning it's easily accessible by every employee no matter where they are based.

If a new team member needs to learn how to use Salesforce, for example, you can add helpful guides that pop up while they work through the key business tasks within Salesforce. The aim is to provide users with instant support and guidance so that they don't have to seek out a YouTube video or training course in an LMS.

3. **A dedicated LMS:** In addition to digital adoption, having an organised **LMS** is key. When users need help, it shouldn't be a mission to find what they're looking for. If it is, that's when they are likely to be turning to Google rather than in-house training.

Invest in a dedicated learning management system and try to make the navigation and visibility of training as clear as possible. Better yet, choose one with a built-in search function that makes it even easier for people to find the training that they are looking for.

4. **Clear expectations and visibility** – It's important to be clear about what training and support is available. Be sure to signpost support so it's easy to find, but also set expectations about how you expect learners to find your training. This can help to reinforce self-learning and also help implement a culture of learning in the flow of work.

The case for learning in the flow of work

There is a compelling case that learning in the flow of work is the future of workplace learning.

As Josh Bersin states: “In learning the problem is different. We don’t want people to be “addicted” to the learning platform, we want them to learn something, apply it, and then go back to work.”

The problem in question is how people consume media. Outside of work, for streaming platforms, games consoles and subscription services, the emphasis is placed on consuming as much content as possible.

However, for learning, it’s about consuming the right level of information, in a way that doesn’t impact productivity and job performance.

And it appears that learning in the flow of work is also what suits many learners best. It promotes self-learning and doesn’t take up as much time, which as we’ve discussed, is one of the main blockers when it comes to workplace learning.

The challenges of learning in the flow of work

There are some hurdles to overcome when implementing learning in the flow of work. It’s also not going to become the be-all and end-all of workplace learning.

It is no substitute for face-to-face and in-person training that requires time to be taken out of the office. This type of training

encourages idea sharing and allows knowledge to be passed on, which can often be invaluable.

For example, the information taught in a [**three-day course learning how to become an expert in Articulate 360**](#), is going to be tricky to self-learn or learn through short learning bursts. Similarly, any training that requires peer-to-peer conversations or presenting is not possible through any of the learning on-the-job methods.

Implementing learning in the flow of work shouldn't mean that communication lines for help are closed. Whilst successful implementation of in-situ learning can reduce frustration, it's likely to be just as frustrating if team leaders or subject matter experts aren't reachable via chat or email.

It also requires a different approach to reporting. Traditionally, you might deem a course effective by completion rate or satisfaction, but these metrics are difficult to achieve through learning in the flow of work. Taking this approach ties your learning much closer to other business KPIs, such as overall performance and productivity.

It may be better to report on the success of this learning through other metrics, such as if support tickets have been reduced or if onboarding was faster by X per cent.

Learning in the flow vs traditional learning

The emergence of learning in the flow of work essentially puts a larger spotlight on how different types of training are delivered. It also may end up benefitting the ways in which more traditional forms of learning are produced.

Does in-person training, or standard eLearning courses become richer and more enjoyable because they don't have to cover all aspects of a topic – because some parts are now delivered through a digital adoption solution?

These courses may become less focused on how to do certain tasks and more about providing true expertise and knowledge – leaving learners feeling that it was time well spent, rather than time wasted.

There's no doubt that learning in the flow of work is here to stay – but it's now for businesses to decide what role it will play in their overall learning and development strategy.