# Engaging employees through online learning

With COVID-19 impacting face-to-face training, many of us have chosen to provide our teams with online professional development resources. Online training is available all the time, which is great, right? The challenge we find is that when resources are available at your fingertips all the time, the impulse to put off doing a course until another day becomes stronger than ever.

What should L&D teams be doing to get employees engaged with online learning materials?

Rapid change in technology has meant constant and lifelong learning is more crucial than ever. You may provide your employees with access to online training to help encourage this, but engagement with the learning materials depends on both the resources provided and the organisation's attitude towards learning.

An organisation with a strong learning culture and engaged employees is great for business and the employees themselves. Not only does it create happier employees who are likely to stay with your organisation for longer, but they are also more efficient, proactive and productive in their roles.

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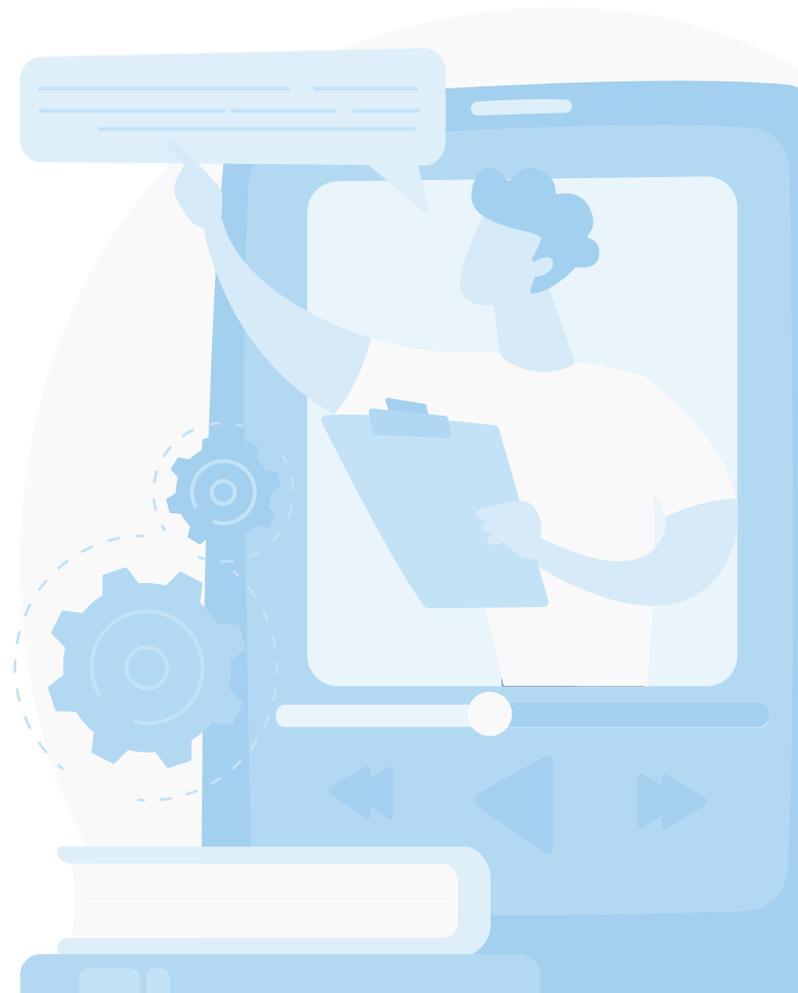
How can you build a learning culture in your business and drive engagement?

Here are four key components of a successful engagement strategy.

1

Flexible

Different people learn in different ways. As part of the L&D team, you know this. Some members of your team will prefer to spend one entire day on their computer working through a topic that is relevant to them, while others may wish to complete shorter spans of learning on their mobile. Think about how you currently provide learning and whether it is suitable for different learning styles and devices.

At accountingcpd we provide a range of options, whether your employees want to complete their learning in 15-minute chunks that tally up throughout the year with our CPD Bites, or an hour a week to deep dive into a topic with our learning pathways. It's crucial that each member of your team can choose the learning style that works for them.

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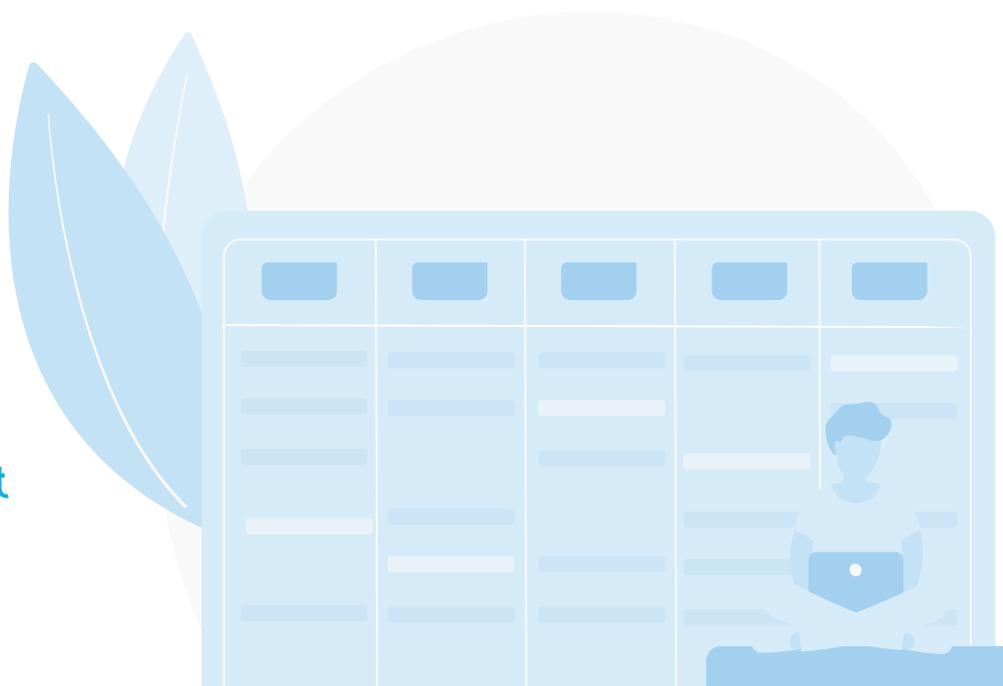
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Encouraging

The organisations with the most engaged teams provide active encouragement with regular reminders to engage with the professional development provided. In some cases, employers have mandated specific courses to their employees and required completion in a set period.
A combination of choice and mandated courses that support your business objectives can be powerful in engaging employees with online learning.

Alongside courses chosen for them, employees should also be able to make personal choices so they can match what they learn to their personal objectives. They will invest more time when they can feel a personal benefit. This works well when tied in with learning plans and is incorporated into performance and development reviews.

2

The encouragement should start as soon as you start providing the service. This is when your employees will be most engaged and excited about using the new resources available to them. To help create a buzz, you can send around internal communications alongside communications from your professional development provider. This is the time to get your team as excited as you are about the service. How can you reach out to your employees? And can you work with your training provider to send personalised emails encouraging use of the training materials?

Once the initial excitement has faded, you need to continue encouraging your employees. It's equally important to provide sustained communication and incorporate training into performance and development reviews. If it comes up in a review that an employee needs improvement or feels less confident in a certain topic, why not suggest a course that would help them positively impact their specific career goals?

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3

Engaging

If you want employees to engage with online learning, that learning needs to be engaging. Research shows that employees are much more likely to benefit from e-learning if it is an active experience. Too many online learning opportunities are little more than passively watching or listening. People do not learn well from that sort of medium. Make sure your online offering enables users to apply what they are learning through 'active' activities like scenarios, action plans, quizzes and discussions.

Professional development is not just about learning from the experts. It is about learning from your peers as well. Sometimes that can be missing from online training, but it doesn't have to be. Choose online courses that facilitate sharing thoughts and learning with peers. This will significantly increase the enjoyment and effectiveness of online learning.

But the social element of learning isn't just limited to the training provided. It also includes sharing thoughts within the same team or more widely throughout your business. By creating a community where everyone shares what they have learnt, your employees start teaching each other, reinforcing their own learning in the process.

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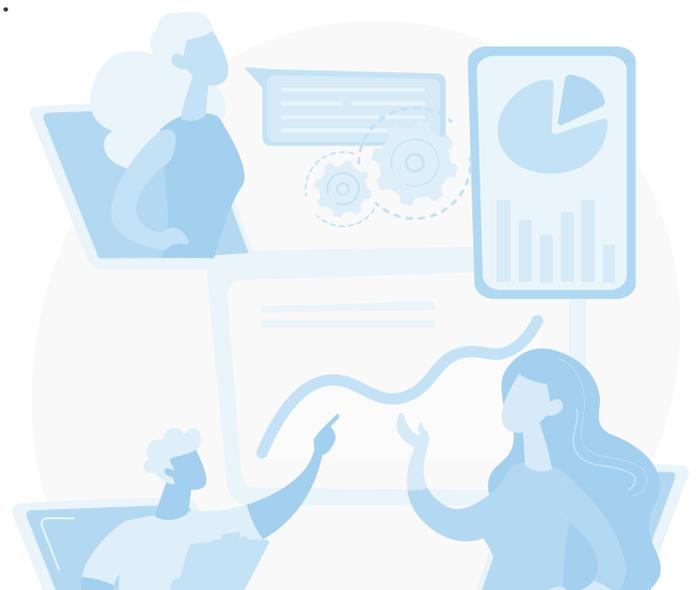
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Relevant

Online learning shouldn't just remain online. It should reach out into the day to day roles of your employees and help in the real world. Your employees need to feel the e-learning they have access to relates to their role in the organisation – it makes the content more purposeful. To be able to do this, choose professional development that make employees think about how they can apply their learning in their role.

Urge your employees to think about their goals within the organisation and the business' goals in general. If each member of your team understands how filling their skill and knowledge gaps will help them and the business, they will in turn be more motivated to use the learning materials provided. It may be hard to know where to get started with this, so here are four questions to get you going -

- Think about your **business' strategic objectives.** What skills are required to get there?

- Are there any **soft skills** that you think need improving? Do you see a need for better communication or teamwork? How about an increasing wish for management training?

- Has everyone adjusted to **working remotely?** Is there any wellbeing training needed? Or more tips on how to effectively work from home?

- What about any **technical skills** specific to their teams? As an example, do they need to be up to date on their tax knowledge? Or do they need to stay on top of changing financial reporting rules?

4

Encouraging the use of flexible, social and relevant learning throughout your organisation creates more engaged and productive employees who are more loyal to your business.

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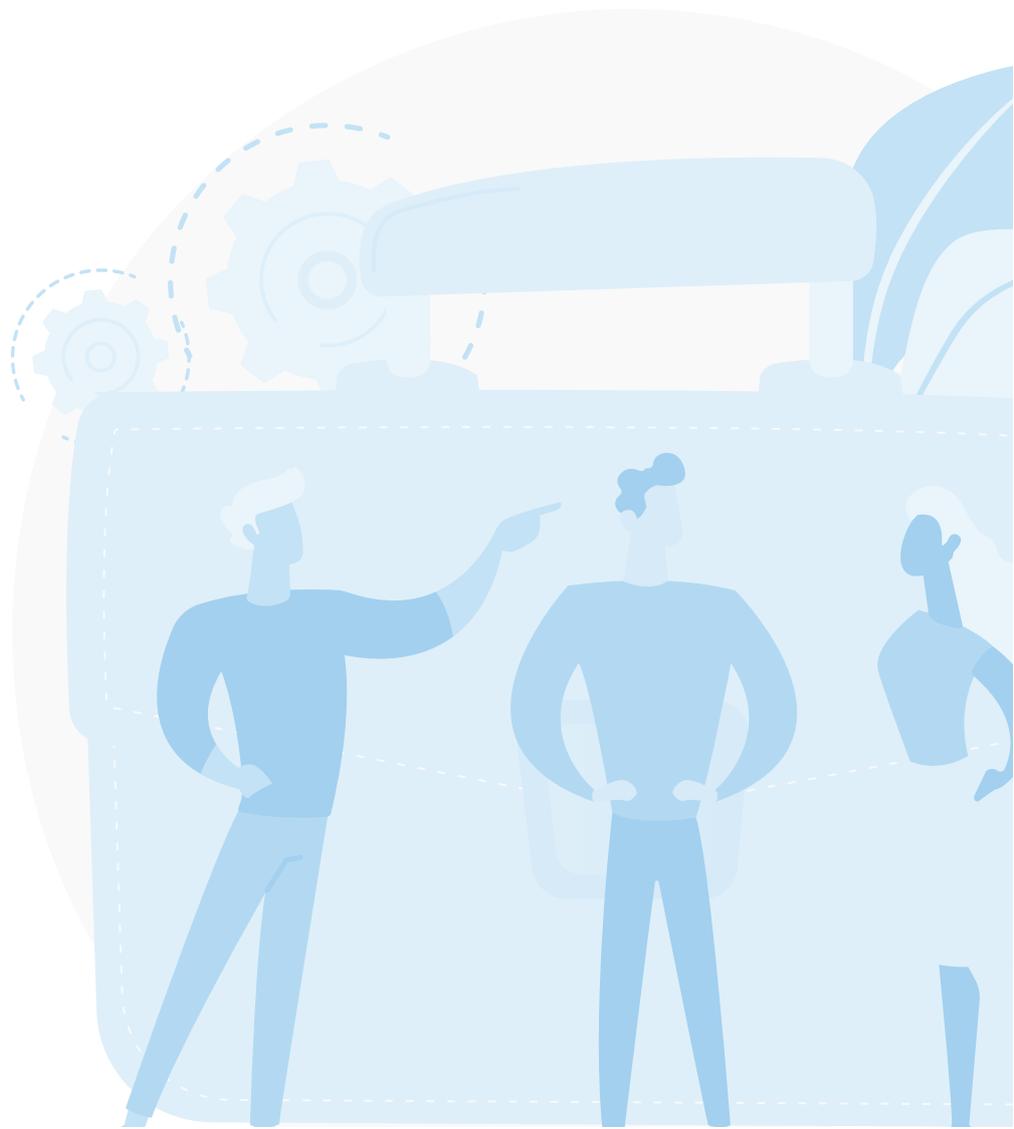
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Nicola Dann manages the Strategic Client Relationships for accountingcpd who develop online CPD resources for accountants covering both technical and professional skills.

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