

Tackling the departmental culture in retail training A Mohive customer case study

Case Study



If there's one thing the retail industry understands it's how to departmentalise. It's a culture that characterises the public face we see on the high street's most established retailers, and it's a culture that runs deep into the inner sanctum of the industry's back office too. But for one departmental leader in TK Maxx's learning and development division, it's a culture that needs a little shaking up.

For years things have worked smoothly for Collette McFarlane, Learning and Development Manager in TK Maxx's Watford based HQ. Line managers tasked with conducting annual staff reviews carefully identified skills gaps in their

departments to collate a clear set of learning requirements for the company's in-house training operation. Armed with a fresh set of goals and objectives, Collette's team was able to produce the company's annual course catalogue,

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custom building modules to address the most pressing needs identified via the review process. With the training portfolio revised and updated each year, the practice routinely produced high definition courses specifically targeting the skills most in need of attention. The process is tried, tested and established, so why are TK Maxx's training experts so intent on overhauling it?



Learning options for retailers today are often inflexible and inaccessible,



“Off site workshops have become the norm for the industry and while these provide an essential opportunity to share and discuss a broad spectrum of training issues, they are by nature, based on the concept of learning in communities. What’s always been lacking in retail is a really robust personal learning and knowledge sharing experience to complement the off site workshop.”

Collette and her team are re-energising the company’s course infrastructure with a Mohive designed Enterprise rapid e-learning platform. Capable of delivering skills training “on demand” whenever and wherever it’s required across the operation, Collette believes the new system will fundamentally change the way learning works at TK Maxx.

“Like many training operations in the retail sector, our people have come to expect certain things from the learning facilities they are offered. Classic classroom based workshops have become the normal training format that line managers expect to be able to offer their staff, but these workshops come with predetermined expectations: Managers know that the staff they are sending on courses will be

away from the workplace for a period of time, sometimes the courses they want to offer a candidate will not be scheduled in the near future and the gap between identifying the learning need and actually delivering the training required to fill the skills gap can be lengthy.”

“Perhaps most importantly, the traditional departmental culture is not best equipped to encourage the degree of interactivity that’s required for really successful knowledge transition in retail today. Skills gaps may be identified at line management level, but they are solved by course modules that are frequently developed outside the real environment of day to day retailing. The solution is to get people to think different across the entire infrastructure: to provide a platform that makes injecting new training ideas and approaches easy for anyone, wherever they operate on our business.”



By delivering this platform via e-learning, we’re encouraging people throughout the operation not just to learn, but to think about how they learn.



By introducing e-learning into its training mix, TK Maxx is embarking on a cultural shift that will see staff at multiple levels of the operation evolving into the next generation of Subject Matter Experts claims Mohive CEO Lars Unneberg.



Success for the collaborative learning strategy depends on highly effective feedback opportunities that motivate representatives at every level of the business.



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“The basic assumption is that the managers best placed to identify skills gaps are also expertly equipped to help develop the training solutions required to fill them. It’s actually quite frustrating for many managers in retail. Traditionally, they’re tasked with pinpointing knowledge gaps in their teams, but given very little opportunity to suggest the tactics that could be deployed to tackle the problems they find. Yet these people are uniquely placed to help shape the very initiatives most likely to work best. By introducing a new level of interactivity into the approach we can encourage the workflow process required to tap into that knowledge and develop better, more relevant, training solutions faster.”

With a portfolio of anything between 20 and 30 courses running at any one time, Collette and the team intend to use the Mohive system to introduce collaborative workflow learning elements into the mix incrementally. e-Modules focused on “conflict management”, “influencing” and “problem solving” have already been introduced into the e-training portfolio in recent weeks and more will follow as the year progresses.

“Problem solving represents a brand new area of learning offered by the business while the “conflict management” and “influencing” modules have been introduced to complement existing classroom or workshop training already offered in that area,” says Collette.

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The beauty of the system is its simplicity.

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“We feel confident that after working with the eLPS for just a day or two we’ll be able to produce e-learning modules that blend neatly with existing elements of

our training mix. The approach is taking knowledge and resources previously locked down within the training department and actually pushing them out to the areas of our business where it’s most needed.”

By putting training resources right at the finger tips of its people, TK Maxx is making the learning support on offer a natural part of the problem solving toolkit that staff use every day. Perceptions are changing across the operation as are cultural expectations:

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No longer isolated from everyday work experience, training at TK Maxx is actually becoming part of the operation’s daily support infrastructure.

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