



A Simple Question Can Significantly Improve the Outcome of Learning Programmes

One of the biggest challenges faced by learning and training programmes today is striving to teach people things in which they are not genuinely interested. That approach rarely works. When people force themselves, or perhaps may be forced, to acquire a specific knowledge that does not hold their interest, that knowledge eventually fades from their memory. If one does not care about the subject matter, why bother retaining any information about it?

In fact, And when knowledge does not last, the individual's knowledge base does not expand or grow. And, consequently, when a person's knowledge base does not have the opportunity to develop, new ideas do not have a chance to emerge.

How can leadership today change the parameters so that employees can seize the potential to learn and grow, thereby boosting the organisation's ability to succeed as well?

The Missing Information

What happens in far too many companies today is something that can be easily remedied. Many organisations skip a critical step, by declining (or forgetting) to ask their employees one simple question – “What are you interested in doing or learning?” That one simple question has the potential to transform an employee's level of engagement and ability to optimally perform on the job.

Exacerbating the effects of eliminating this critical step, many leaders also erroneously assume that employees, by default, should be interested in learning about things that the organisation has chosen for them. Obviously, an employer expects their employees to focus on the specific areas in which the company operates – no matter what employees think or desire. After all, it is part of their job. But the point that employers sometimes miss is that if employees have no interest in those areas, then the employee-position match may not be a good fit.

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Yet, asking employees about their interests may not provide a simple answer either. For one reason, knowing what employees think may not lead to an employer taking any steps to do something with that information. Another, more troubling reason is that, unfortunately, many individuals are not even aware of their own interests. Consequently, they fail to answer the question that can transform their personal and work lives: “What am I really interested in learning or doing?”

The Flawed Perception

To explain how a person can answer that question truthfully, consider the concept of a glass being half full or half empty. This concept provides a clear example of the learning process – and what can happen when people learn, and retain, information about the subjects that interest them, that engage them, and that motivate them to grow.

First of all, a fundamental idea that people should accept is that nothing, absolutely nothing, comes from nothing. Yet, surprisingly, many people believe that new ideas actually come out of nothing! The phrases – “out of the blue” and “out of nowhere” – reflect the common belief still shared by

so many people. In other words, ideas suddenly dawn on people, or people become geniuses overnight.

But new ideas do not result from nothing. That has never happened in history, not since the big bang. This concept is simply a comfortable misconception that irrationally explains creativity, imagination, and innovation.

Artists often provide one of the most folkloric examples of this misconception. For example, some artists claim that all they have to do is set up an empty canvas, stand in front of it, and, suddenly, vivid images come into their minds, enabling them to create a masterpiece! The same explanation occurs with some writers, who claim that merely sitting down in front of a blank page on their laptop or notebook provides the push for storylines, characters, and dialogue to enter their imagination, enabling them to write a great novel!

The reality is that these scenarios do not happen – never have and never will. Why is that?



The Underlying Foundation of Creativity

Everything we do and everything we think has a relation to something that happened before, words and actions that we have overheard, witnessed, or experienced. If there is nothing in the glass or perhaps it is left empty, nothing will emerge from that glass. It is as simple as that. Everyone needs to comprehend that reality at the foundational level when it comes to learning as well.

However, if that glass is filled, depending on how and with what it is filled, then innovative and creative ideas have the potential to emerge at some stage.

Creative people fill their glasses with many different things, with diversified knowledge, and with multiple experiences. Further, they continue to learn and experience different things, understanding that such progress leads to a fulfilled life and career. For these individuals, one interest leads to another new one. They study science and art, two areas that may seem unrelated. Yet, in the end, when so-called artists (or, talented individuals) mix the contents of the glass together, miraculous ideas come to life, ideas that have the potential to improve their situations and those of others with whom they interact. When faced with these ideas, such

people say, “wow, that was an idea that I never expected would come to me.” And they appreciate the process, understanding why it works.

The Optimal Process

When innovation happens, true talent accepts that the idea evolved over time from what was originally placed in the glass – a culmination of knowledge, experience, and interests in which the individual has invested time and effort.

To address the fundamental problem with the majority of learning or training programmes in existence today – that is, forcing people to learn about things in which they have no interest – employers must first ask their employees what they wish to learn, what they want to do, and what they care about. Innovative and creative solutions cannot happen in a vacuum – in an empty glass – when employees do not have a grasp of their own talents, abilities, and knowledge. And when individuals are unaware of their own interests, and how they can contribute positively to any group to which they belong, they will face lifelong difficulty in achieving any lasting outcomes or satisfaction.



Not only will the individual lead a dissatisfied life, but the organisations that employ them will suffer from their disengagement and lack of motivation. Blending an organisation's expectations for the employee and the employee's personal desires can – and will – prove advantageous to all.



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