

Business Advanced

Unit 7: Learning





Starting Point

1. 'Some people stop learning the moment they leave school. Others go on learning all their lives.' Do you agree?
2. What is different about the process of learning in each of these situations?
 - Learning about historical events in school
 - Learning how to cook
 - Learning how to negotiate successfully
 - Learning how to balance your work and private life
3. Think about any training courses you have done at work. What was done good or bad about them? What did you learn?



Working with Words I Training & learning

1. What do the terms “learning organization” and “systems thinking” mean to you? What do they refer to? Read the text and find out more about these terms.

Becoming a ‘learning organization’

Peter Senge is a senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management and the founder of the Society for Organizational Learning. He came up with the concept of ‘learning organizations’ in his best-selling business management book, The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organisation. He defined them as companies ‘... where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where **collective aspiration** is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.’ At the heart of this vision is what he called ‘systems thinking’ – an ability to see and think about the organization as a whole, not just as a lot of disconnected parts. It emphasizes the need for the whole team to focus, learn, and build a **shared vision**.

It sounds great, but does it actually work in practice? Those who maintain that it does suggest that although it tends to cause upheaval and a real **paradigm shift** within a company, it usually leads to improved results. This is because ‘systems thinking’ means all levels of staff are actively encouraged to be creative and to take a holistic view of the business. **Performance management** and **personal development plans** play a key role in ensuring this happens, and the result is that all staff become far more engaged in the success of the company.

Conversely, there are some who question whether creating a true learning organization is possible in the real world. They argue that in most cases a radical **structural change** to an organization’s culture is needed for a company to stop thinking about training individuals and to start focusing on learning at the wider organizational level – and this kind of change is often unrealistic. Additionally, there is suspicion that although the idea is to have total **employee participation** and engagement in the learning process, in reality management will continue to impose values top-down on a reluctant, but deferential workforce. The argument against the ‘learning organization’ concept is that in the long-run, what the average employee really needs is to be able to do what they do better – not to spend their time worrying about the bigger picture, and that companies should simply direct training towards addressing any **skills deficit** and encouraging professional development across the board in response to individual training needs.

2. Answer questions 1-2 about the text in 1.

1. What advantages does a 'learning organization' have over its competitors?
2. What are the arguments for and against a company becoming a learning organization?

3. Match the phrases in bold in the text in 1 to the definitions below (1-8).

1. a lack of ability and knowledge amongst a group of people:
2. a radical change from one way of thinking to another:
3. a view of the future that everyone is committed to:
4. a written record of how an employee would like to progress in their career:
5. ambition and a desire for success that is shared by the group:
6. facilitation of staff achievement and progression by a company:
7. personal involvement of a staff member in an activity:
8. when a company reorganizes itself and introduces new systems:

4. Fill in the following sentences with the underlined phrases in the text in 1 .

1. ‘I just don't believe in this idea that anyone can become a millionaire if they try hard enough. How often does this actually happen ____ ?’
2. 'Yes, of course this project is going to be a nightmare to organize - but stop worrying about all the minor details - you need to focus on ____.’
3. 'We've increased profitability in every single division of the company. It's been an incredibly successful year ____ .’
4. ‘I know that we're spending a lot on training at the moment, but give it a few years - we're going to see huge benefits from this ____ .’

5. Discuss what the problems are in (1-5) and what advice you would give. Use vocabulary from 3 and 4 and the phrases from the list.

- **There's a lack of ...**
- **There isn't any ...**
- **They should**
- **There needs to be ...**

1. 'Many members of the company feel that no one is thinking about their career progression.'
2. 'Everyone's just focusing on their own tasks, so there's no team spirit.'
3. 'There's a rigid hierarchical management structure here. Staff feel that they're never going to get promoted because higher positions rarely become available, and thus they have shown lack of motivation.'
4. 'We're facing real problems recruiting people with the right kind of expertise.'
5. 'We organized lots of training courses, but hardly anyone has signed up.'

- collective aspiration
- shared vision
- paradigm shift
- performance management
- personal development plans
- in the real world
- structural
- employee participation
- in the long-run
- the bigger picture
- skills deficit
- across the board

6. Jane Willis is a training manager at a large media company. Listen to the interview and answer questions 1-3.

1. Does her company's training approach encourage 'systems thinking'?
2. How does Jane categorize the two types of training offered at her company?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of her company's approach?



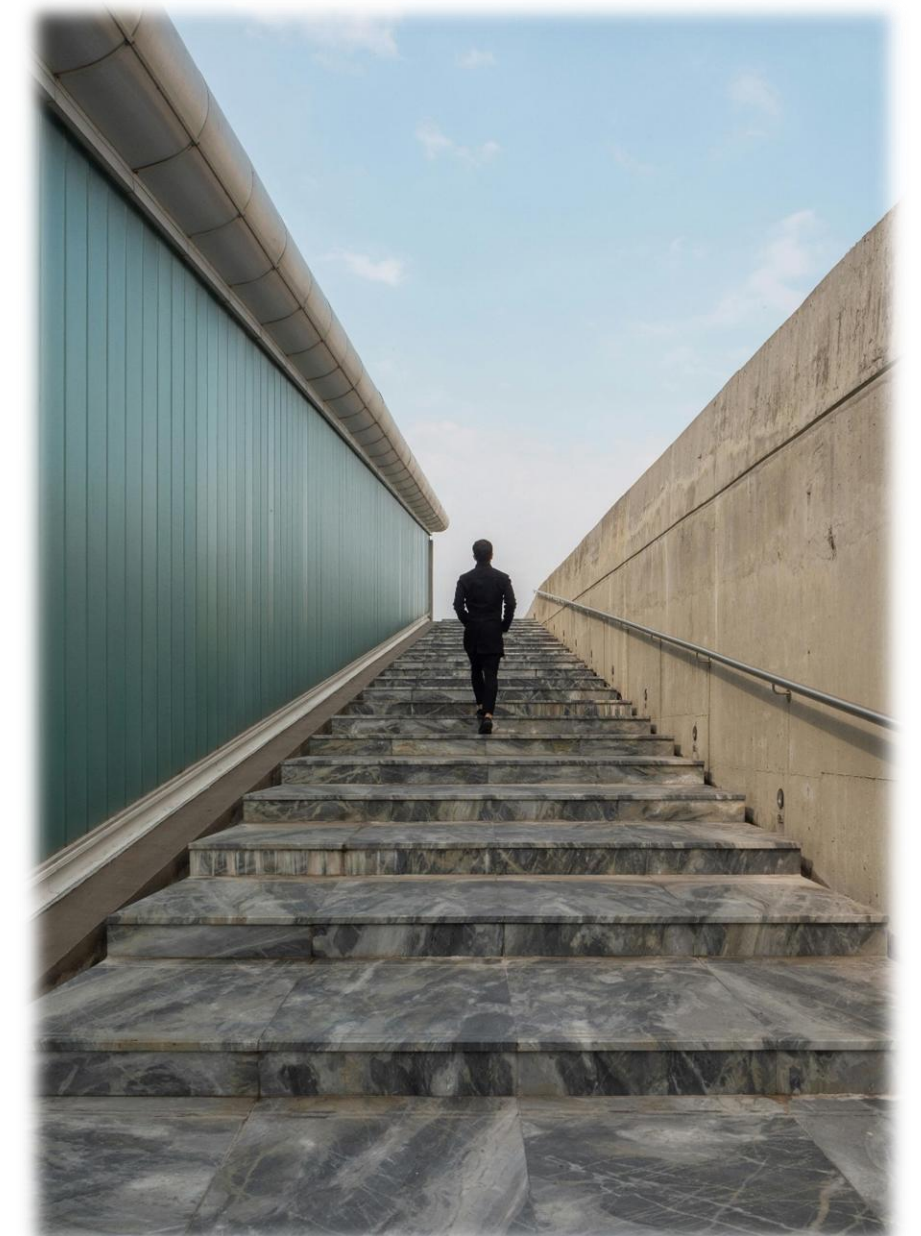
Audio 7.1

7. What adjectives describe "training" and "approach" in the interview? Re-listen to confirm.

1. _____training
2. _____approach

8. Match the adjectives you noted in 7 to the pertinent definitions (1-5).

1. answering a wide range of needs (two adjectives): _____
2. answering particular work-related needs (one adjective): _____
3. coming from all areas and levels of a company (two adjectives): _____
4. coming from key departments / management (two adjectives): _____
5. coming from the individual member of staff (one adjective): _____



9. Read the information about training approaches at the two companies. Discuss the questions (1-2) below.

1. How would you describe each approach?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

Company 1

- no formalized training approach - training needs of each department are extremely varied, so this would be
- too complicated no in-house training - only learning from more experienced employees whilst doing the job
- money for external training available, but only given in response to a direct request from an employee

Company 2

- structured and formalized training approach
- senior management decide what kind of training courses are made available
- employees in first year of employment must complete two courses designed for their particular job - this is decided by the line managers
- employees in the second year of employment must complete two more general courses related to the company (e.g. product presentations, business processes, etc.) - this is decided by the line managers and employees during appraisals
- employees must complete two training courses per year after their second year

10. Think about your own company.

1. How would you describe your company's approach to training and learning?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of that approach?
3. What do you think is the best way of establishing individual training needs?
4. What changes would you suggest? What would be the results of these changes?

Business Communication I Communication Strategies

Context

Kirsten Marr is the training manager at Thurn Biotechnology. This morning, she had a phone call with her line manager, Tamara Soledo, head of HR, to plan next year's training programme.

1. Listen to Thania calling Kirsten and a related call received by Kirsten. What is the main problem and what is the eventual solution?



Audio 7.2 – 7.3

2. Listen again and complete the expressions (1-13) below.

1. Did _____ Friday?
2. I'm not quite _____.
3. Could you _____ again?
4. And, what _____ is, you don't think we have...
5. No, it's _____ we don't have the trainers. We don't have the expertise.
6. Could you _____ what the problems were?
7. What was _____ again?
8. Consuelo _____ say?
9. Could I ask you _____ some details – how many participants...
10. What _____ it's annoying for us because...
11. ...do you _____ you can't do this training for us?
12. Sorry, I'm not _____ I understand.
13. That's not what I mean. _____ is that...

3. Match the following expressions in 2 to categories (a-f).

- a. Asking for repetition of a whole idea:
- b. Checking a fact:
- c. Checking understanding:
- d. Clarifying following a misunderstanding:
- e. Requesting more information about something:
- f. Saying that you haven't heard or fully understood what was said:



4. Look at the following extracts and correct the mistakes. Then listen to check your answers.

1. Actually, no, it doesn't matter - I guess it's a bit outside the topic right now.
2. Anyway, ... sorry. That's a bit of a digress.
3. By this way, talking about costs ...
4. Just a thought. It may not be entirely relative, but ...
5. Let's get back at the main issue.
6. Oh, that recalls me. Have you heard that Leon's leaving to go and work for another training provider?

**Audio 7.4****5. Which corrected expressions in 4 ... ?**

- a. move away from the main topic to talk about something else _____
- b. move the conversation back to the main topic _____

6. Look at the following topics and choose one that you find interesting. Make notes of some true things you can say about it.

1. a new product proposal you are considering making
2. a suggestion you have for improving efficiency in your company
3. problems with a current project
4. something that annoys you at work
5. something that was decided at a recent meeting which you disagree with



Key Expressions

Checking facts

- Did you say ... ?*
- What was ... again?*

Checking understanding

- What you're saying is that ...*
- Do you mean that ... ?*

Asking for clarification

- I'm not quite clear about your last suggestion.*
- I'm not quite sure I understand.*
- Could you run it by me again?*
- Could you clarify exactly what the problems were?*
- Could I ask you to spell out some details?*

Dealing with a misunderstanding

- No, it's not that we don't ...*
- We don't ...*
- What I'm saying is ...*
- That's not what I mean. What I mean is ...*

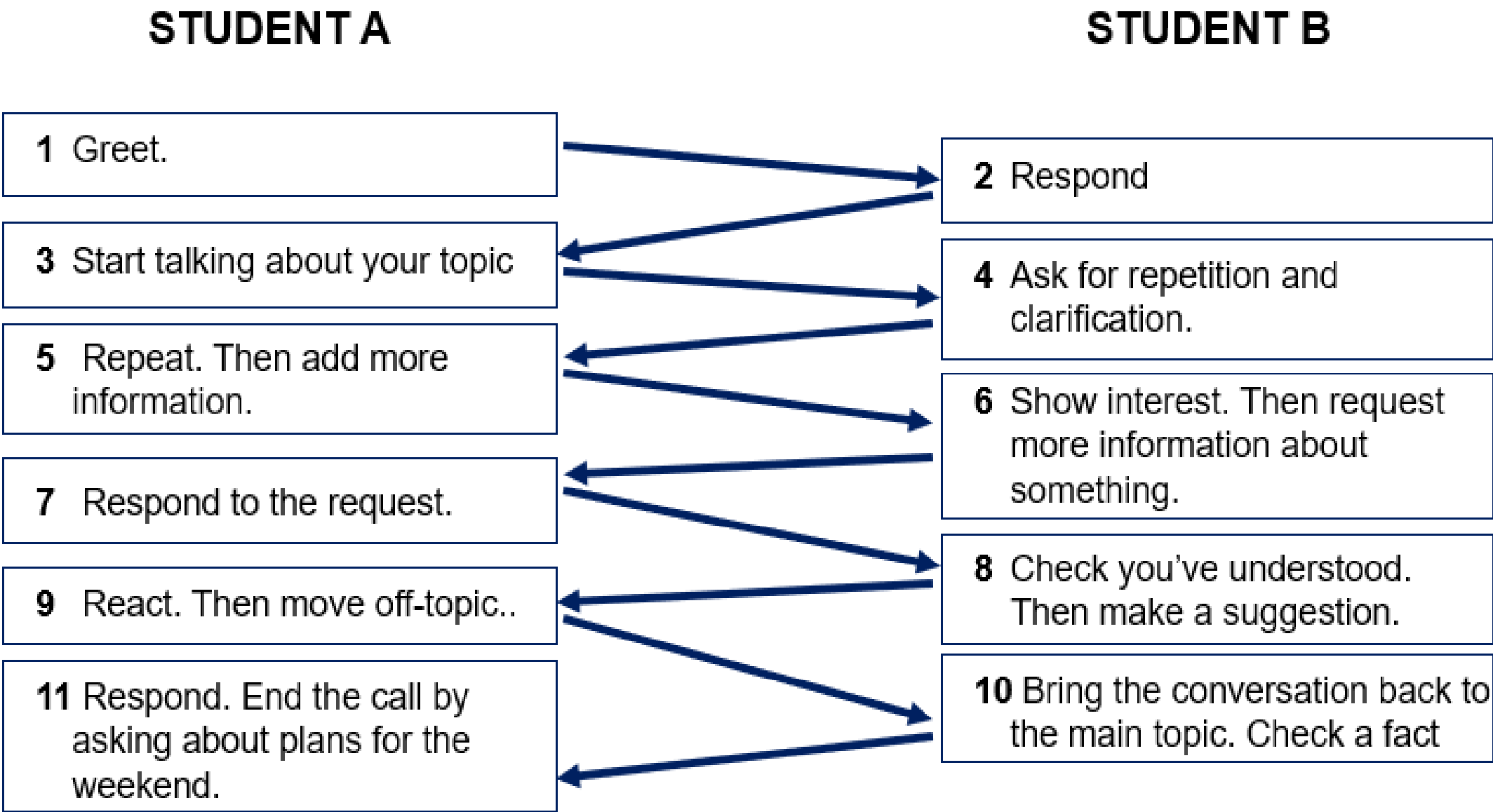
Digressing

- Just a thought. It may not be entirely relevant, but ...*
- That reminds me. Have you heard ... ?*
- By the way, talking about ...*

Resuming

- Actually, it doesn't matter - it's a bit off-topic right now.*
- Anyway ... sorry. That's a bit of a digression.*
- Let's get back to the main issue.*

7. Role-Play: Call a friend at another company to discuss topic 6, seek advice, and use the flowchart to guide your conversation.



8. Optional. Switch roles and repeat.

Culture Question

One reason that communicating by phone can be difficult is because you are unable to use gestures or body language.

- ⦿ How important are gestures , eye contact and body language in your culture?
- ⦿ Are there any gestures / body language that are not acceptable?
- ⦿ Are there any gestures / body language typical of your own culture that may be misinterpreted in international business meetings?



Language at work I The future in the past

1. Look at the conversation and answer questions 1-4.

Tania ... I haven't seen that report on the sales project yet.

Kris... I remembered that yesterday. I **was going to** write it this morning, but ...

1. Is Kris trying to explain her schedule or make an excuse?
2. Has Kris written the report or not?
3. When did she decide that she would write the report 'this morning'?
4. Why do you think the structure in bold is known as 'the future in the past'?

2. Match the examples of 'the future in the past' in a-g to categories 1-7.

- a. I always **knew she would** make CEO of this company! It's always been her dream
- b. I **was going to** contact her this month, but apparently she's on holiday.
- c. I **was going to** do it, but I forgot. I feel sorry for it.
- d. I **was meeting** Kim at 8.00 a.m. on Monday, but he's just cancelled.
- e. She **assured me it would be** ready by the end of business last month.
- f. **They were supposed to** call me before 1.00 p.m., but I haven't heard anything.
- g. When she became Sales Manager, we thought she **would** increase profits.

- a. an excuse ____
- b. a personal conviction ____
- c. an intention ____
- d. a prediction ____
- e. an arrangement ____
- f. an obligation ____
- g. a promise ____

3. Discuss what the speaker could say in situations (1-5).

Example: I was going to show you a sample of our new product, but unfortunately I haven't brought it with me today.

Past	Present
1. I wanted to take a sample of the new product to the meeting.	I'm at the meeting. I have forgotten the sample of the new product.
2. I have to give a presentation at the conference in Rome next week.	My boss has asked me to cancel all other arrangements and go to Florida for a meeting next week.
3. We think this year will be quite profitable.	Our products haven't sold as well as expected.
4. We're aiming to get a 10% discount on all orders over €20,000 during the negotiation.	They are telling us that they can't offer more than 8% discount on any order.
5. I'm having lunch with Marco tomorrow.	Marco has cancelled our lunch appointment because he's too busy.

4. For each of the following situations, consider the following examples from your life or work. Talk about them using 'the future in the past'. Your colleague can ask questions.

1. A time when you had to change your plans at the last minute (e.g. a cancelled overseas visit). Explain what your original plan was and what prevented it from happening.
2. Something you believed someone else (e.g. a colleague or a competitor) was planning to do - even though you weren't certain (e.g. the predicted launch of a new product). Explain what you thought would happen, why you believed what you did and whether your predictions proved to be correct or not.
3. A task that you were personally responsible for (e.g. organizing the resources for a conference). Explain what other people expected you would do - and how much you were able to fulfil these expectations.

Practically Speaking I

Expressing dissatisfaction

1. Listen to three conversations. In each case decide:

1. where the people are
2. what they don't like
3. if they both have the same views



Audio 7.5

2. Fill in the following sentences (1- 11). Then listen again and check your answers.

1. Though I have to admit, I'm not getting _____ it.
2. And the pace is so slow! It's _____!
3. I know what you mean. It's really _____, too.
4. In fact, I think I've _____.
5. Well, I agree it hasn't _____ so far ...
6. I have to say that I _____ professional.
7. Well, the cover for example – _____.
8. And to be frank, I'm _____ the wording either.
9. I _____ staying.
10. To be honest, I'm _____ that I have to be here at all.
11. ... I just _____ my time.

3. Now match sentences 1-11 in 2 to categories (a-e).

- a. The speaker says that something does not reach the right level of quality.
- b. The speaker says that something is not as good as they hoped beforehand.
- c. The speaker says that something isn't useful for them.
- d. The speaker says that something is making them impatient or bored.
- e. The speaker says that they cannot stand any more of something.



4. Sometimes it's important to soften what you say to make it sound less direct. Look at sentences (1-4) and underline the words used to soften what is said.

- 1. To be honest, I think this meeting is a bit of a waste of time.
- 2. I can't really see the point of everyone being here if they're not contributing to anything.
- 3. I have to admit, I'm not really enjoying my new job.
- 4. I'm afraid that this report still needs some work.

5. Decide how you would soften sentences 1-5

- 1. Your performance this year has been poor.
- 2. I hate the project I'm working on at the moment.
- 3. You need to completely rewrite your presentation. It makes no sense.
- 4. This seminar is a waste of time. And the coffee is undrinkable.
- 5. Why are we here if there's nothing for us to do?

6. Read situations 1-4 and think of phrases from 2 that could be used in each one. Then work with a colleague and practise the conversations.

- 1. You meet your colleague at the coffee machine. Discuss how bad the coffee at work is and how poor the canteen food is.
- 2. You are both attending a long presentation given by a regional manager about last quarter's turnover, but it's very boring. Find out if your colleague is feeling the same.
- 3. You have both just seen an announcement about the annual staff bonus. It is surprisingly low. Discuss this with your colleague.
- 4. You are both very busy, but have been asked by your boss to attend an informal presentation given by another department about their work. It is not relevant to you or your current tasks. Discuss this with your colleague.

extra vocabulary

Key word I say

Match the use of **say** in 1-6 to definitions a-f.

1. Let him *have his say*.

2. *Let's say* ... the 24th? Do you think you'll be able to do it by then?

3. *Say* that we go ahead with this - what will happen?

4. *I say* let's forget it.

5. If you had, *say*, a bad cold, you might not come to work.

6. *You can say that again!*

a. for example

b. Assuming

c. my opinion is

d. that's a great point, which I agree with

e. give his opinion

f. how about

Talking Point

Context: e-learning

Organizations need to identify a method of training employees at all levels in a cost-efficient way that leads to higher productivity and better performance. Many companies rely heavily on e-learning as a way to educate their workforce. In addition to being an economical option, e-learning ensures that all employees have access to the training materials and that they can complete the training anytime and anywhere they prefer. However, this form of learning can feel isolating, and the lack of interaction with others might not produce the results or boost employee performance to the extent decision-makers expect.

Learning Through Collaboration

Designing and developing corporate learning programs is one thing; actively engaging a diverse group of employees in that learning process is another. Often, new employees feel overwhelmed by the scope of learning required to adjust to their roles. This can leave them feeling isolated. This isn't surprising, considering the growing reliance on e-learning modules that allow employees to learn at their own pace. In many cases, this learning starts even before their first day on the job.

Revisiting the Fundamentals of Human Learning

From the earliest days of human experience, we have absorbed information from the world around us at an incredible rate. The amount we are exposed to, the content of the learning, and the people we interact with all play a significant role in shaping how we learn and grow. Notably, experts in the field of learning argue that current corporate learning methods only address a fraction of our natural ability to take in and process new information. This approach often lacks a meaningful impact on job performance. The critical missing element in corporate learning is the involvement of other people.

The Value of Learning Interventions

Marek Hyla, Senior Strategy Principal at Accenture CN and co-founder of the XY Learning Team, encourages corporate learning centers to reevaluate how people learn most effectively. He advocates for a more blended approach to enhance employee experiences as they develop new concepts for the workplace. As he states, "While we won't entirely move away from traditional methods like lectures, seminars, and self-paced learning guides, every learning initiative should actively engage teams to help them apply knowledge and skills to real-world scenarios."

The Future of Corporate Learning

When discussing the future of corporate learning and how it can foster engagement and motivation among employees, Hyla highlighted that "the most overlooked aspect of the learning process is the lack of ongoing support and encouragement from supervisors."

When organizations adopt collaborative learning strategies, employees can work together on projects and practice applying their skills in realistic settings. Adding interactive elements and collaborative interventions can bring concepts to life. This shift can positively impact both employee performance and the overall success of the organization.



Discussion

1. What does Marek Hyla think is missing in corporate e-learning?
2. Which of the different kinds of 'learning interventions' mentioned in the text do you think work best?
3. What kind of training do new and existing employees in your company receive? How humanistic is the training provided?



1. Look at the list of training methods below and decide which ones to use in a 'blended-learning' program for new employees at your company. You can add any other ideas you have. Consider:

- what the new employees will do before/during/after each training intervention
- how you will make your program interactive
- how your program will help new employees to do their job better
- how new employees will learn from working together

Training approaches

- **Live demo:** show employees how to do something and talk them through the process.
- **On-the-job training:** accompanying experienced colleagues on their everyday work.
- **In-company e-learning sessions.**
- **Videos of recorded presentations.**
- **Interactive classroom training.**
- Specifically designed **apps** for new employees to use on their mobile devices.
- 'Serious' **computer-based games** which simulate situations new employees will find themselves in.



2. Present your blended training plan to another group. Explain why you have chosen this approach, and what the advantages for the employees and for the company are. You can get some ideas in <https://www.myngle.com/language-courses>