

White Paper:

Build it and They Won't Come!

The Doom Loop of Learner Engagement



By Christopher Quinn

Overview

In this White Paper we will discuss:

1. Why organizations struggle with Learner Engagement and how they can use an understanding of 'Felt Need' to change this dynamic.

The Issue

Here is the scenario we often encounter- an organization has invested in creating a curriculum comprised of different types of learning assets. Much to the dismay of the organization's learning department & commercial leadership; employees are not flocking to the courses or tools offered. It is like 'pulling teeth' to get people to access the learning content. At this point given the amount of money spent in creating the learning assets, there is an unwillingness to invest more until people start engaging with what was already created. This situation is what I call the 'doom loop of learner engagement'!

This situation begs all kinds of questions to understand the true 'root issues' at play.

But first, let's understand the audience and any perceptions they hold that might impact their views toward utilizing learning & development assets.

Here is our provocation:

Why would you expect people to feel a need for these learning assets when studies highlight the fact that:

- 87% of employees have unrealistically high opinions of their performance
 - Are surprised by negative feedback
 - Don't believe they get clear feedback on what they should do
 - Believe their boss is holding them back
- More than 50% of Managers said they have employees who are 'stuck' at performance levels below their potential
- 70% of employees who are aware that their boss is unhappy with their performance can't verbalize what they are doing wrong or how they are going to change

Source: VitalSmarts Lake Wobegan at work Study n=1,528

Why does this matter?

The results of the study paint a picture of overall discomfort in its most ambiguous form. The majority of individuals are what we call 'unconsciously incompetent'; they don't know what they don't know. Even those who are 'consciously incompetent' can't verbalize what they are doing wrong or how to improve. A very high percentage of Managers believe they have employees 'stuck at performance levels below their potential'- but cannot identify the specific issues and best remedies!

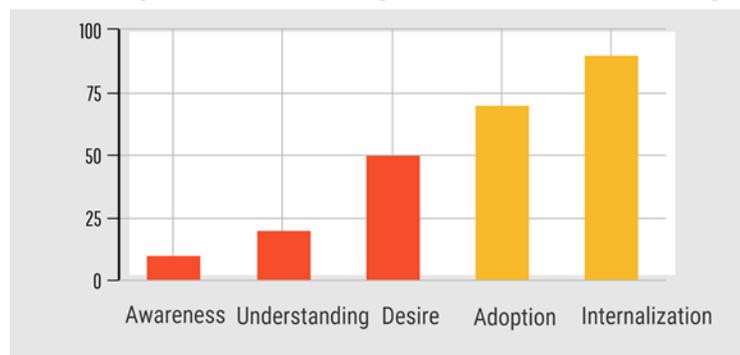
Our experience working with marketing organizations for more than 16 years has led us to identify a critical readiness metric- 'Felt Need' for development. We started measuring this for individuals and their managers to gain the perceptions of the need for development of 'job role specific competencies'. Having assessed individuals and their managers over the past 7 years utilizing the 'Felt Need' metric, we have uncovered

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the following insights regarding how to gain individual 'buy-in' for development:



Don't Skip the First Three Stages of Commitment to Change!



www.imprintlearn.com * - Marketing Readiness Database

Too many organizations build the inventory of learning assets and 'skip the first three steps' of the Stages of Commitment to Change' outlined in the illustration. They start with 'adoption' and then wonder why they struggle. The 'Felt Need' metric encapsulates the overlooked dimensions- Awareness, Understanding & Desire. Given what research tells us about the perceptions of individuals and managers regarding their performance of (highlighted earlier)- the choice to skip the first three stages leads to the outcome and scenario described earlier in this document.

So a Good Question to Ask is: What creates a 'felt need' for development?

Here is what we have learned about conditions which foster a strong felt need:

1. Data is presented to learner's that is:
 - a. **Specific**- to their role & relevant to executing that job role
 - b. **Helpful**- provides targeted 'gap analyses'. Not generalized feedback regarding comparisons to an external benchmark.
 - c. **Standards**- establishes and shares in an actionable form that clearly delineates 'what good looks like'. Ideally articulated in observable behavioral terms to ensure consistent understanding and application.
 - d. **Clear about Learning Assets recommended utilization**- links to the most 'mission critical' gaps for individuals based on their job role. Not a generalized set of offerings that do not address the individual or organization's collective particular needs. These gaps should be derived from a robust context-intensive diagnostic assessment.

But we hate assessments!

We are also aware of the fact that assessments rank right up there with Internal Revenue Service (IRS) audits and Public Speaking on everyone's professional 'bucket list.' If a well formulated and executed assessment is a key enabler to gaining learner engagement and most importantly- driving business performance, then how can conducting a diagnostic assessment engagement be made more palatable?

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Since we have been in the diagnostic assessment business for some time, we have identified some diagnostic evaluation 'Engagement Drivers' that can make the whole process less stressful and more valuable. These are outlined in the illustration below:

Engagement Drivers



It's not about the shiny objects!

The discussion of 'learner engagement' often focuses on the various instructional design techniques that might increase engagement. Is micro-learning the ticket? What about gamification?

The issue we are describing is 'upstream' from instructional design technology or techniques. It is much more fundamental and is rooted in the fact that many people do not have a well-defined 'felt need' for development.

Any good marketing effort begins and ends with an understanding of the target customer's pain points. It should be no different in the development of marketing personnel within your organization. How can you convince them that your solution is what they need when you and they are not clear about the particular pain point addressed?

Don't make the mistake of skipping right to the 'adoption stage' of transformation and getting into the 'Doom Loop of Engagement.' The end of learning is not knowledge but transformation. Take the time to understand and foster the 'felt need' for development if you want a fully engaged learner.

If you want to learn more about your marketing organizations 'Felt Need' let us know by contacting us at info@imprintlearn.com.

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The founder of Imprint Learning Solutions a firm supporting organizational learning and development professionals with innovative diagnostic readiness tools and learning solutions tailored to marketing capability development. He led global marketing organizations both large and small during his 16+ year career as a commercial leader/practitioner in technology based companies. Learn more about Chris at <http://www.imprintlearn.com/team/christopher-quinn/>