


Learning is vital to personal and organisational success. But, like all other habits, it can only be sustained if it is nurtured and given plenty of opportunities to be practised. Organisations that value and promote learning in all its forms - whether it occurs in a formal training course, development of a new project, group recreational activities such as book clubs or informal chats over coffee during break times - can reap the benefits of a workforce which is alive and engaged with its surroundings.

What is café culture?

Café culture is a feature of organisations where informal learning is part of everyday life. In these vibrant environments, time and space are set aside for people to relax, converse, learn something new and connect with others. Innovative ideas flow naturally in settings where learning of all types is intrinsically valued.

MARSHALLS BROOKFOOT CASE STUDY



Brookfoot is a unit of Marshalls plc, the UK's leading manufacturer of superior natural stone and innovative concrete hard landscaping products, with an annual turnover of £43 million. The West Yorkshire site in Halifax employs 175 people.

What was done?

- The objective four years ago was to create a learning environment which would validate and equip employees for automation, to formalise management training and to maximise the contribution that all internal stakeholders could make to the business. The strategy became known as 4 blue boxes.
- Employees were encouraged to take part in informal learning activities such as coaching, mentoring and volunteering activities alongside formal learning including NVQs from Level 1-7.

What were the business benefits?

- A 'learning culture' was created in which people sought to broaden their skills. Changing culture, and training, has enabled employees to feel valued. Marshalls has an extremely low turnover of staff and everyone knows that they will be helped and supported through their career.
- The culture change has led to a number of innovative ideas by employees that have produced significant cost savings for the business.
- Improvements to the business have been documented and recognised by external bodies: accident rates (Rospa), Quality and Environmental systems (BSI PAS99), overall equipment effectiveness, outputs, overtime reduction, cost per tonne reduction, waste recycling, changeover times and training systems through National and Regional Training Awards (UK Skills).
- Individuals were recognised for:
 - Learning achievements (by The Learning and Skills Council and National Training Awards)
 - Volunteering (BITC Yorkshire & Humberside 'Volunteers of the Year')

GOOGLE CASE STUDY

Google is an international technology company whose mission is 'to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful'. Since its founding, the company has committed itself to ensuring that employees (known as 'Googlers') are 'able to keep creating, inventing, finding solutions, breaking boundaries, and realising new technologies we never even imagined possible'.

What was done?

The work environment has been designed to challenge and engage employees, including:

- Flat management structure, small teams and performance-related pay, all based on a philosophy based on a 'positive view of human nature';
- Significant resources invested in promoting employee learning and development, including 'Google University' and a European Learning and Development Team;
- Innovative and fun activities designed to encourage staff to meet, interact and work as a team;

What were the business benefits?

- The work environment which Google has created has helped to make the company an employer of choice, with approximately 1300 job applications received daily and one of the lowest staff turnover rates in the IT industry (5%).
- Google was recognised as the UK's best place to work in 2008 by the Great Place to Work Institute.

to learn more about these and other stories, visit www.skillstories.org/learningcultures

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How can I learn to create café culture in my company?

Go to www.skillstories.org/learningcultures where you can:

- Find practical guidance on cultivating a learning culture in your organisation
- Find out what companies like yours are doing, and how they have achieved their successes
- Publicise your learning culture with a quote or case study
- Demonstrate a public commitment to promoting learning in the workplace
- Access news, events and resources
- Find and work with new partners to increase learning opportunities
- Discover how to embrace new ways of learning, including the use of technology and broadcasting
- Find flexible ways of using existing spaces, or opening up new spaces, for learning.



Why is café culture important?

To succeed in challenging economic times, organisations need people who can cope with increasingly uncertain environments. Employees will need to let go of old ways of doing things that no longer work and develop new skills and capabilities. Enhanced concentration, attention, awareness and listening will all be key to survival. Organisations will be more likely to survive and flourish when their people are awake and connected with the world around them.

What are the benefits of promoting café culture?

According to the Government's Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing report (2008), people who maintain the 'five a day' habits of keeping up learning, taking notice of the world around them and connecting with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours - as well as staying physically active and practising generosity towards others - will enjoy better mental health and wellbeing.

Employers who create a café culture which promotes informal learning, nurtures sensitivity to the environment and fosters a sense of community - as well as promoting physical activity and encouraging generosity - can enjoy a range of business benefits including:

Improved	Reduced
Employee health and wellbeing	Stress
Employee engagement and satisfaction	Sickness absence rates
Employee recruitment and retention	Employee turnover
Productivity	Recruitment costs
Product and service quality	Agency cover costs
Brand image	Health-related employee benefits
Customer satisfaction and loyalty	Liability cover
	Litigation costs

see the back page to find out how www.skillstories.org/learningcultures can help you realise the benefits of promoting a café culture >>



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www.bitc.org.uk
Email: anita.powell@bitc.org.uk

Registered Details 137 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7RQ. Telephone: 020 7566 8650
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Learn to release your hidden assets
Discover how café culture can
transform your company