500 WORDS ON
LEADERS & DIGITALIZATION

eTrainer

Working as an eTRAINER

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The more virtually we work, the more important are our social skills!

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With the introduction of eLearning, we decided to discuss this new learning approach with our Programme Director, Fiona Higginson. Giulia Colafrancesco, Junior Consultant at CLP, asks questions on how the trainer's role will have to change to keep pace with virtual learning solutions.

Giulia: We can see a trend that more organisations want to make use of eLearning in their leadership development approach. Fiona, what is the positive side of being an eTrainer?

Fiona Higginson: Actually, I am not sure if eTrainer is the right terminology. I work, for example, not only in the capacity of trainer. I am responsible for creating, designing and enhancing the complete learning journey of participants. My skillset is shifting from designing face-to-face interventions to blended approaches. For example, we are currently designing a leadership development programme that is built out of two face-to-face modules, one at the start and one at the end. In-between, however, we are working with participants virtually.

Here, we have to design content and to think about how participants can best digest that content virtually. We have to think about how we sustain and monitor participants' progress and how we translate e.g. simulations into the virtual world. That is not only exciting but intellectually challenging. I think the trainer world is getting richer every day.

G: What is the positive side for the leader learning in the virtual world?

F: Well the obvious is having no travel time and having their individual learning needs satisfied. But, the most important advantage is time and speed. Participants are able to work overtime on projects and tasks to create something valuable for the organisation, coming together with their peers only for supervision or alignment.

These virtual meetings can be spontaneously planned depending on their schedule and/or urgency. Also, as virtual content is normally laid out in nuggets, or digestible pieces, leaders can access the content flexibly to suit their schedule and go back and review content as they require it in their business environment. It's like having knowledge at your fingertips whenever you need it.

CLP is constantly evolving leadership development practices. CLP publishes 500 words periodically that reflect its experiences and research, and those of other organisations to understand and master the challenges and demands of leadership development today. We are excited to hear about your experiences. Please share your thoughts, concerns or examples with us at: 500words@change-leadership.net

What are the implications of possibly giving up face-to-face delivery?

F: Firstly, let me emphasise that I personally welcome this trend of using the best of both worlds: a face-to-face approach, with its advantages and disadvantages, as well as the digital. In a pure digital learning environment, trainers would lose the possibility of connecting with the participants on a deep personal level.

The closer the personal connection, the easier it is to understand their business realities and to adjust the content and interventions to their current (and changing) learning needs. Face-to-face deliveries offer a number of informal moments (coffee breaks, after sessions, etc.) in which the trainer can connect and the participants can open up more freely.

When we think about providing content that the participant can access at their own pace in a virtual setting, we lose the possibility of catching any questions as they pop up or of re-adjusting to knowledge levels that were not clear beforehand.

There is also the possibility that we would lose the opportunity to understand the business of our client better as, every time that we interact with the participants, we learn more and more about the environment our client operates in, from their stories, challenges, anecdotes and opinions.

This richness of detail is impossible to communicate in briefing situations or in the design process and comes from regular, intense contact with the people we create the programmes for – the participant and ultimately the organisation.

G: How do you adjust your language and approach to the virtual world?

F: The more virtually we work, the more important are our social skills. If you only have a person's voice, and maybe sometimes their face on a screen, your non-verbal antennae have to be really tuned into what's going on 'beneath the iceberg'.
You have to concentrate on reading between the lines, understanding tone of voice and actively listening to what's being communicated.

As I said before, the more "low-touch" we offer, the more "high-touch" we need!

Yours,
Giulia Colafrancesco and CLP team

pre-designed eLearning courses

ePGC

e-Peer Group Coaching guides peers through a coaching process, so that they know why, when and what to do to sustain each other professionally.

TPT

Team Performance Tool is a course for intact teams with the objective that projects are on time, on budget, and with high costumer satisfaction.

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This three-part online course on change management is for all those who need to lead change and influence change dynamics.