

Keeping Employees On Board: Blenders and Natuurwerk

1) Program Information and Intended Goal

An informative session was held where employees from both Blenders and Naturework were present. During these sessions, the program facilitators introduced the concept of "Keeping Employees on Board" and explained the structure of the buddy program.

Following these informative sessions, employees were encouraged to enroll and were provided with a self-assessment in the form of a competency web, highlighting 21st-century skills. Subsequently, we conducted individual introductory conversations with each employee to assess their 21st-century skills, discuss their self-assessment, identify areas they wanted to work on, and explore their approach to the buddy program. Drawing insights from these discussions, the program facilitators collaborated to match participants based on their skills and learning needs, aiming for mutual learning.

For both Blenders and Naturework, individual kickoff sessions were planned for each pair. During these sessions, the pairs were briefed about their match, the program's overarching objectives, and the concept of digital storytelling. Subsequently, the pairs were given the opportunity to articulate their learning goals, create a timeline, and brainstorm their strategy for digital storytelling, even if they were already taking initial steps.

Participants were given a three-month timeframe to work on these six learning goals. A mid-term evaluation was organized in a group setting, followed by individual closing evaluations with the pairs.

2) Participant Expectations

Each individual initially held their own expectations at the start of this program. Some participated to track progress, driven by curiosity about outcomes and a desire to contribute their own ideas. Others sought to use this program as a means to acquaint themselves with colleagues from other teams, gaining a clear understanding of these individuals' roles within the organization.

Within the Blenders and Naturework organizations, work largely takes on a digital form, making this aspect appealing to all participants. The communication platform also exists in a digital form, and most indicated that there was room for improvement and learning needs in this regard. Each participant had the opportunity to specify areas they wished to strengthen, whether specific skills within digital programs or acquiring digital tools to facilitate their tasks.

However, the results from the competency web regarding 21st-century skills indicated a desire to work on communication skills as well, both internally and externally, in written and verbal forms. The significance of effective communication was emphasized. Additionally, a clear engagement was observed regarding the issue of older employees and how to retain them within the workforce, including strategies for maintaining their energy levels.

3) Results

A total of five pairs embarked on this journey, each with its distinct trajectory. Initially, every duo engaged in an introductory conversation with one of the program facilitators. This discussion provided them with the opportunity to get to know each other better, understand the rationale behind their pairing, and establish agreements regarding the scheduling of six sessions and their objectives. This process wasn't equally smooth for everyone, given the busy schedules that were

often booked months in advance. Most managed to secure these moments, while others did so sporadically, and some even struggled due to overloaded agendas and time constraints.

For some duos, jointly formulating objectives posed a challenge. However, we observed that when individuals are conscious of their own strengths and learning needs (potentially discovered through the competency web), the planning process becomes smoother and the subject matter can be pinpointed more directly.

After the trajectories were set in motion, the pairs underwent a mid-term group evaluation and a final closing evaluation. During these assessments, various competency areas were discussed, with a notable emphasis on the digital aspects they worked on. This encompassed topics such as social media, government websites, setting up a digital signature, crafting engaging presentations using tools like PowerPoint, and optimizing presentations for clients through visualization, smart tools, and color palettes. The structure of emails and enhancing communicative efficiency were also addressed and tackled during these evaluations.

Two pairs also focused on refining communication skills. These pairs had expressed their intention to work on this aspect beforehand and indeed followed through. Together, they deliberated on enhancing their phrasing in emails and adopting less confrontational communication approaches when interacting with others.

Beyond this, several other crucial topics were addressed, enriching the experience of getting to know each other on personal, collegial, and professional levels, with regards to the various aspects and projects they were involved in. There was even a scenario in which someone got to know a new colleague through their buddy, resulting in an ongoing collaboration.

The program yielded several outcomes that offer valuable insights. Initially, the idea was for the duos to execute digital storytelling as part of their trajectory, depicting their experiences within the program through a digital narrative. However, it became apparent that the project encompassed too many objectives to incorporate this. It's more effective to treat matters like digital storytelling and its associated techniques as separate components and ensure regular refreshing of these skills.

From the results of a specific trajectory, it was evident that translating "best practices," both concerning organizational issues and aspects like project management, communication, and more, into standard procedures can yield significant benefits. This will contribute to efficiency, quality, and profitability within the organization.

For many duos, scheduling and conducting the planned six sessions proved to be a challenge. This led to the conclusion that a three-month timeframe isn't always feasible. Based on the trajectory outcomes, it was suggested that extending this timeframe to six months to a year would be more suitable, allowing participants to engage in the project more efficiently and consciously.

One trajectory highlighted the necessity for ample individual guidance per pair. In fact, a specific duo didn't even initiate their trajectory due to a lack of clarity about the exact purpose. Moreover, this duo couldn't fully participate in the mid-term evaluation, which discouraged them from continuing the trajectory. They couldn't address any topic due to the absence of guidance, unclear instructions, and a lack of preliminary information. Across all trajectories, the need for individual guidance, both at the duo and individual levels, was evident. It can often be challenging for a duo to undergo an evaluation together, as some matters might not be fully discussed in each other's presence. Considering individual evaluations or employing online forms and anonymously discussing common concerns in a group could offer an effective solution.

The duos experienced growth in various areas and discovered their areas of excellence. Several are now more willing to take concrete steps, ask each other for help, and critically reflect on their learning journey. Remarkably, there's even a duo that decides to continue the learning process and proceed as a pair. In the pursuit of retaining older employees within the workforce, establishing a strong bond with younger colleagues emerges as a crucial element. This involves the youthful energy combined with the thoughtfulness of the senior employees, forming a valuable complement for both parties. Prioritizing a solid collaboration and a strong intergenerational bond emerged as one of the most essential aspects.

4) Conclusions

The progression of the trajectories with the five pairs has yielded various insights, pinpointing several critical factors for success. Firstly, time constraints emerged as a significant challenge. The initial plan of six meetings within a three-month timeframe proved ambitious and led to logistical difficulties due to participants' packed schedules. This underscores the necessity of considering a more extended timeframe for more efficient trajectories.

Throughout the trajectories, guidance emerged as an indispensable element in achieving success. Particularly evident in a duo facing ambiguity and thus unable to initiate, individual guidance proved invaluable. The significance of goal orientation and follow-through was emphatically highlighted, implying that continuous guidance throughout the entire trajectory holds paramount importance.

The competencies covered, including digital skills and communication abilities, proved vital. Emphasis was placed on developing skills that not only contributed to individual growth but also enhanced collaboration within the pairs. Special attention was devoted to strengthening intergenerational relationships, wherein the synergy between younger and older employees formed a valuable dynamic.

An intriguing discovery was that participants displayed a higher inclination towards action, questioning, and critical reflection as the trajectories unfolded. This suggests that awareness of one's strengths and learning needs can act as a catalyst for personal development and growth.

The lessons gleaned from these trajectories extend beyond individual development. They provide valuable insights for translating best practices into standard working methods and enhancing communication within organizations. The significance of individual guidance and the focus on specific competencies stand out as guiding principles in this regard.

5) Advice for Process Facilitators and Organizations

Valuable learning points and improvements for the future have emerged from the experiences of this trajectory:

1. **Increased Engagement:** The limited number of employee sign-ups suggests that formalizing this initiative within the organization and involving employers more actively in the process could be beneficial. Active participation from employers can enhance event visibility among employees and increase its appeal as they see employer endorsement.
2. **Enhanced Matching Process:** Not every pair proved to be an ideal match, sometimes due to prior frequent collaborations or lack of common discussion topics. To improve this, we can make the matching process more efficient by involving participants. For instance, this could involve going through the process together, potentially employing a 'speed dating' approach. This could result in better matches and a greater likelihood of successful collaboration.

3. **Accessible Language for Competency Web:** Complex language in the competency web might deter some employees. It's essential to present words and concepts in more understandable language, ensuring that everyone has access to and comprehension of the content.
4. **Extended Timeframe:** Scheduling six meetings within a three-month period proved challenging. Extending the duration to six months to a year provides participants with the opportunity to plan appointments more efficiently and allocate more time for considerations and reflection.
5. **Formulating Learning Objectives:** Some pairs struggled with defining learning objectives. Developing a technique or tool to collaboratively establish learning objectives could simplify this process and promote uniformity in objectives.
6. **Intensive Trajectory Guidance:** Closer guidance for the trajectories is necessary. This involves developing a standardized approach rather than just relying on "best practices," aiding in formulating learning objectives, facilitating interim evaluations, and guiding individuals or pairs throughout the entire trajectory. It's also important to make it clear that trajectory facilitators are available if issues arise.
7. **Optimizing Digital Storytelling:** The execution of digital storytelling needs to be more closely monitored. This can be achieved by involving pairs more in the process and organizing separate sessions to guide and support them in creating their digital story.
8. **Individual Trajectory Approach:** Each trajectory and individual are unique, with varying needs. Offering tailored support is crucial, taking into account the specific context and preferences of each individual pair.

By taking these learning points seriously and implementing the necessary adjustments, the future execution of such trajectories can become even more successful, positively impacting the development of participants and the organization as a whole.