

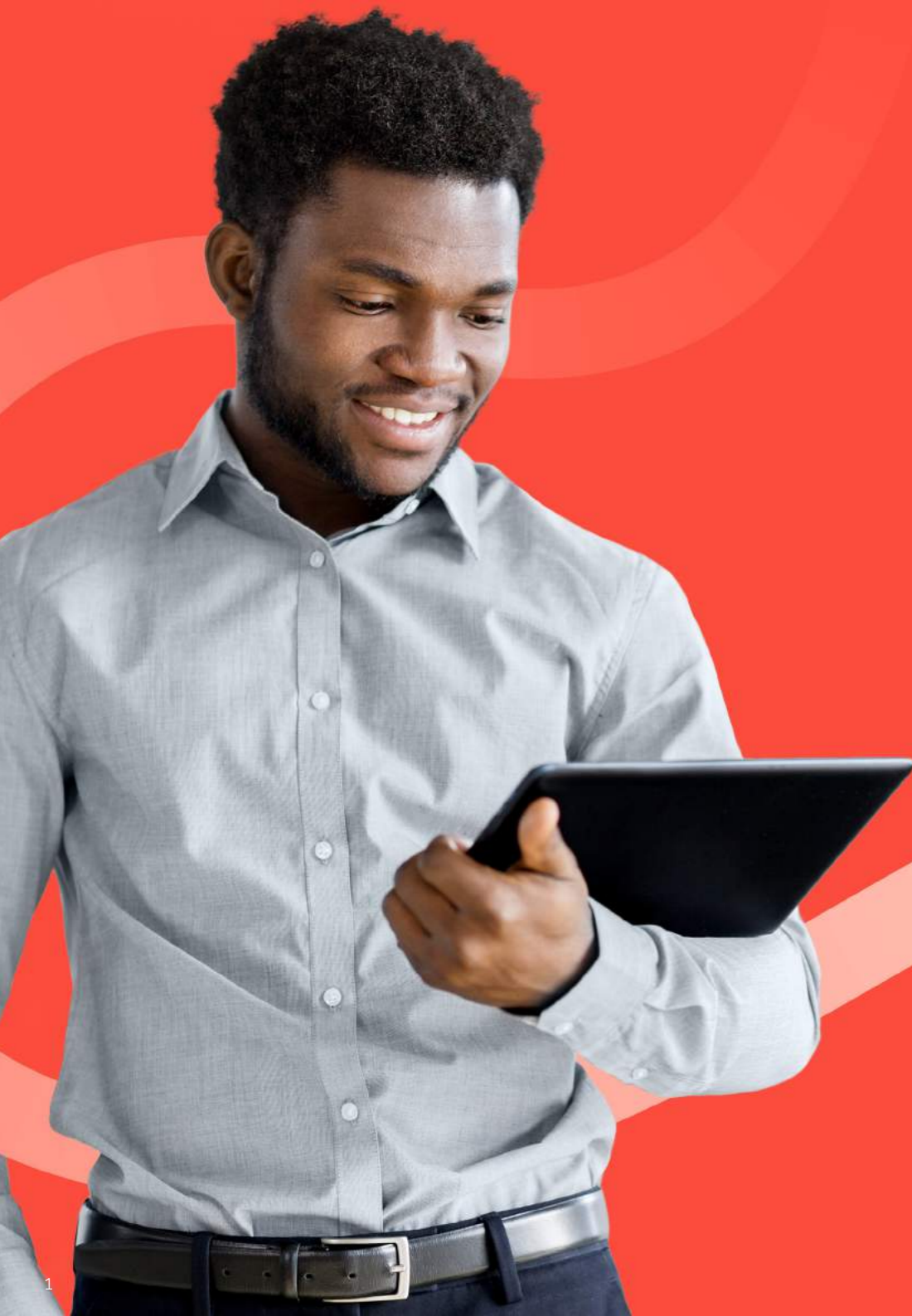
CHANGING LEARNING CULTURES:



A HOW-TO GUIDE

THRIVE

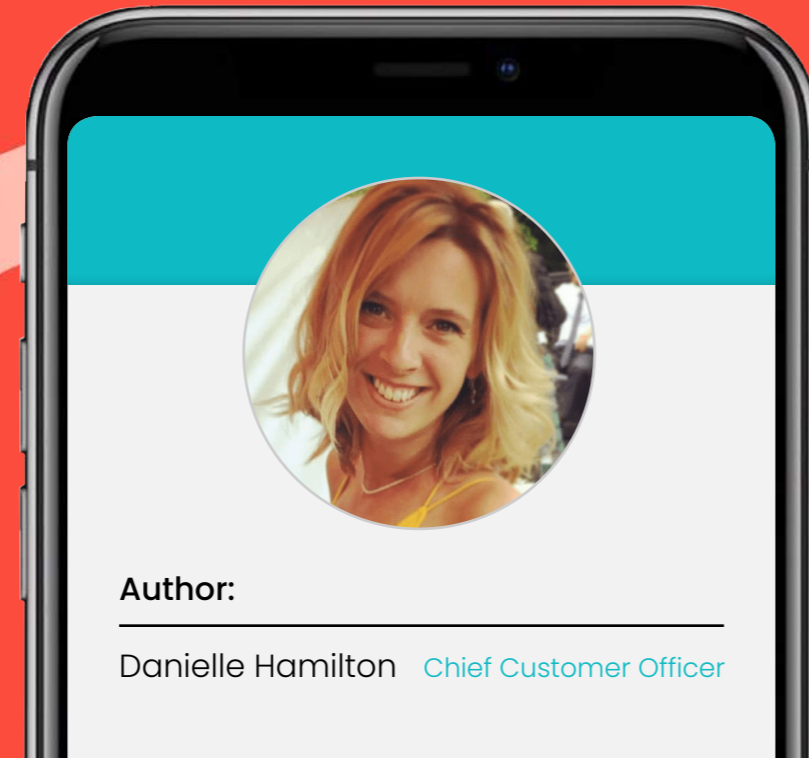
BE BOLD. BE BRAVE. THRIVE.



I've worked in technology for nearly a decade, and most of that time has been spent in the world of learning and development. Be that on vendor side developing and implementing LMSs, or indeed working client side and creating strategies which work. I've seen and done a lot in that time - but one of the key things I've seen time and time again is the challenge in changing learning cultures.

Changing cultures is for long term gains, not short-sighted, temporary wins. By working with loads of different businesses I have been able to cultivate a clear vision of what it takes to truly change a working culture. Here I will share what I have learned and indeed, how you can develop really strong working cultures.

It's not an easy thing to do, and you have to be really committed and ready to make it work. Some of this will require us to change our thinking, learn new skills and approach how we work differently. But that's not a bad thing, right?



CONTENTS

Do you really want to change?.....	3
What does changing cultures look like?.....	5
Reposition learning.....	7
Connecting people to content and people to people.....	9
Better understand learning motivation.....	17
Create a buzz.....	21
Changing cultures is hard, but not impossible.....	27

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO CHANGE?

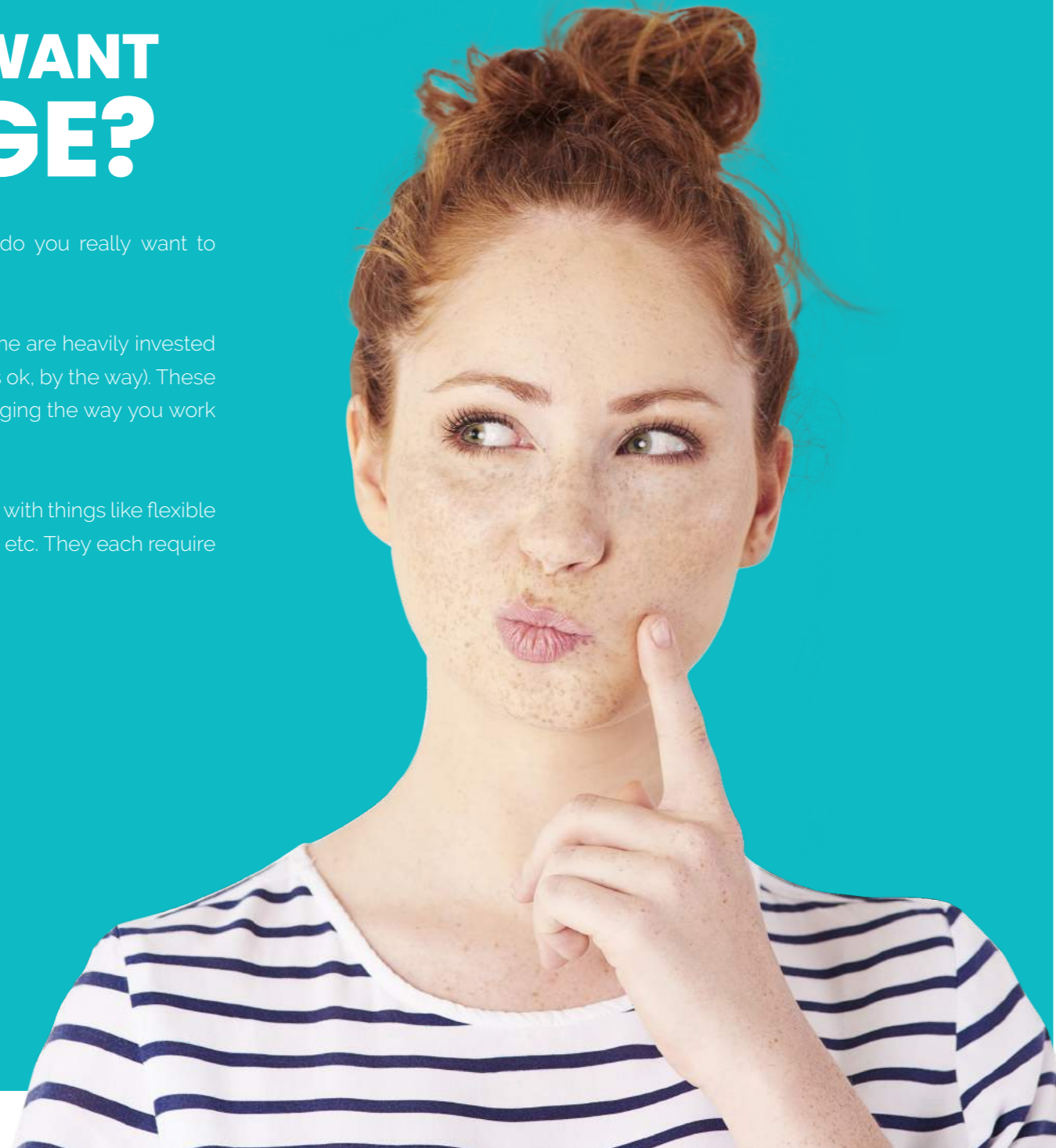
The very first question you need to ask yourself is, do you really want to change? And I mean really, really change?

I've worked with a lot of businesses over the years; some are heavily invested in evolving and some just aren't quite there yet (which is ok, by the way). These changes will likely rely on you learning new skills, changing the way you work with the business and relinquishing control.

This isn't just happening in learning, it's across the board with things like flexible hours, unlimited holiday, agile projects, remote working etc. They each require organisations to trust and let go.

Are you truly ready to do that?

If you are, here's some advice that could help you.



WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS WANT?

I thought I'd start with looking at some of the common challenges businesses face today, as there are typically some commonalities across the board including:

- Digital transformation
- Employee engagement
- Agile working
- Developing leaders
- Equality and Diversity
- Transparency & improved communication

I'm sure you'll recognise at least one of these, if not all of them, and you're not alone. According to [IDG's 2018 Digital Business Survey](#), more and more organisations are evolving into a digital business model to improve customer experience and employee engagement. But their biggest struggle? [Culture management](#).

What's common between each of these challenges is that they will all involve some element of cultural change, whether it be creating a more inclusive environment, convincing employees to change their ways of working or adoption of new technologies.

COMPLIANCE ALONE CANNOT CHANGE CULTURES

Cultural change (and its challenges) is not a new thing, but it's only something I experienced personally fairly recently. I started my career implementing LMSs and as a result, the concept of culture was not something I ever really came across. Why?

Because I was implementing platforms designed to track and manage compliance training. People had to do it; meaning there was never any persuasion or convincing L&D had to do. It was only when I started [working with LXPs](#) and tried to implement one in my own organisation, that I realised: "Oh my, this isn't just about the technology, this is a whole new way of doing things and is essentially changing a culture!"

WHAT DOES CHANGING CULTURES LOOK LIKE?

In my time in this industry, here are some of the common concepts and strategies I have seen many L&D departments try to improve on, evolve to or instigate in their business:

- Point of need learning
- Transparent environment
- Self-directed learning
- Equal access to resources
- Opportunities for coaching
- Increased and improved access to content
- A wider variety of learning content

Some of these concepts are quite new, many of which will require a notable shift in skills and attitude, from both L&D teams and employees.

So, what do we do? How do we take a learning culture from a place where learning is something that's 'done', something obligatory, solely done when they're specifically asked or have a particular requirement, to an environment where it's continuous, at the point of need and therefore so much part of the every day that it's not even identified as learning?

WE BRING IN SOME SHINY NEW TECH...

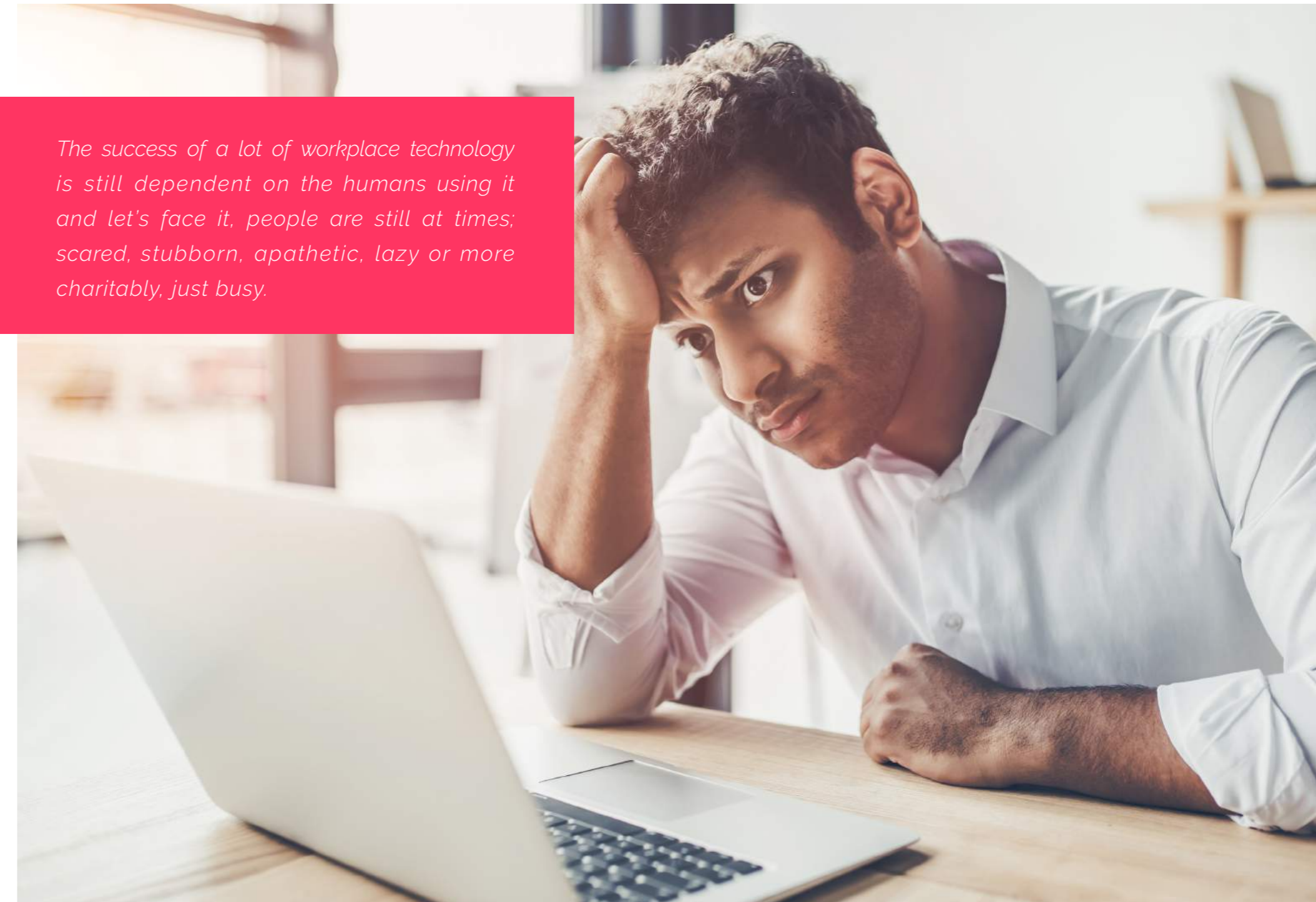
...and hope that will do the job for us. But just implementing tech doesn't do much to change existing mindsets, establish new ways of working and encourage employees to drive their own development.

Here's a common scenario I've seen many times:

"I want my employees to take more responsibility for their learning, so I'm going to give them access to an online catalogue of books, videos and PDFs." That's a really great idea, but how do you know people will use it? 'If you build it, they will come' doesn't really apply in this context.

Ironically, in a world where technology is advancing faster than ever, tech can still only take us so far. The success of a lot of workplace technology is still dependent on the humans using it and let's face it, people are still at times; scared, stubborn, apathetic, lazy or more charitably, just busy. Technology is definitely a part of it, but what else can we do to change a learning culture?

The success of a lot of workplace technology is still dependent on the humans using it and let's face it, people are still at times; scared, stubborn, apathetic, lazy or more charitably, just busy.



1. REPOSITION LEARNING



First things first: we need to change our perception of learning. Let's explore some examples of things that might occur in the workplace and ask the question, are these learning?

- "I receive an email telling me my company just won a massive new account"
- "My colleague shows me how to submit my expenses"
- "I explain something to a client and they really do not understand it"
- "My CEO records a little update to tell us what's been going on in the business this week"

This conversation has been going on a while, but I think it's still a valid discussion. For the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to tell you the answer and that is Yes! Yes they're all learning! Every time I am exposed to new information, I am learning!

And these days, we're exposed to much more information than ever before. It's literally everywhere! That said, part of the problem we cause for ourselves is segmenting learning off as a thing that is done, over there and not something that is accepted as a part of the everyday.

To allow us to begin to change this, we need to look at how L&D, but also learning in general, is perceived in our business.

"Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room"

Jeff Bezos

WHAT'S YOUR L&D BRAND?

When working with [clients on our LXP rollouts](#), the first thing we look at with them is 'What's your L&D brand'. Being aware of how you are perceived is highly valuable when embarking on, well, anything, but in particular large scale change management. What are people saying about L&D and training when you're not in the room? What is your brand?

We recently conducted some research that found that 41% of employees commit no time to learning every day. This is a huge percentage which I personally think may be correlated with the brand attached to learning. In reality, this can't be possible, people learn all the time, everyday, but they just don't perceive it as learning. We need to change their perceptions.

To demonstrate this point a bit further, here are some things I have learnt in the past week alone:

- Amaretto is made from apricot kernels (learnt from a good old fashioned cookbook)
- Sugar soap is amazing for cleaning kitchens (couldn't be bothered to get kitchen cleaner)
- How to whitewash and distress a wooden chair (YouTube, super into DIY atm)
- Ctrl + Enter will add a line break in a Word doc (our CTO Mark taught me this)
- If I put a cup of tea in reach of my dog, he **will** drink it (let's put this down to experience)

This could be anything; I learnt to tie my shoes by watching my big brother for example, or in the workplace you might pick up on a good way to start meetings from watching a colleague.

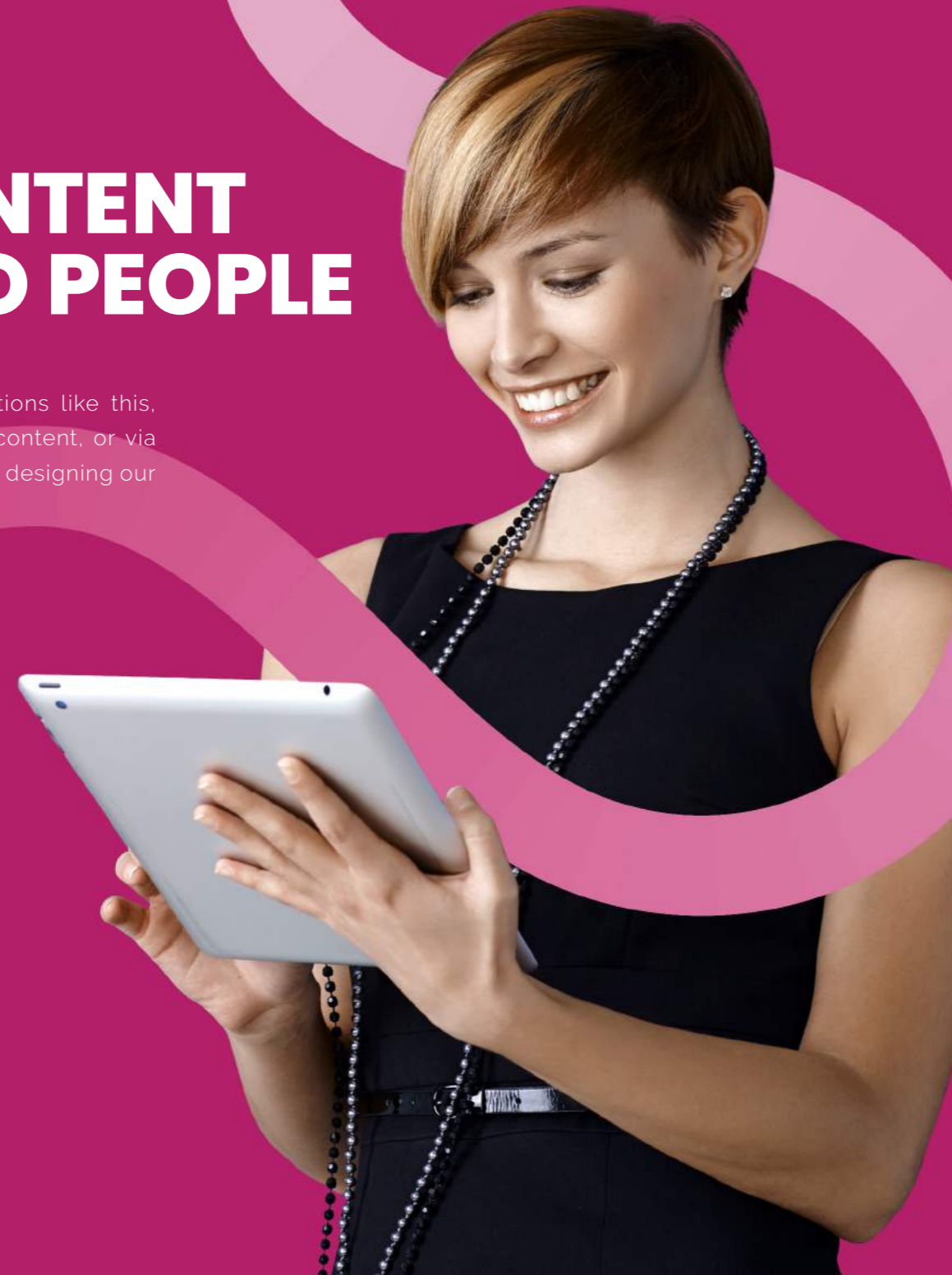
These are all things that someone wouldn't necessarily consider to be learning, because they weren't in a classroom or logged into their LMS at the time.

But it's **STILL** learning.

2. CONNECTING PEOPLE TO CONTENT AND PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

Ultimately when we break it down to its very foundations like this, learning is just information. Information consumed via content, or via people and experiences. This is why when embarking on designing our LXP, our main focus was:

"How do we connect people to content and people to people in the most personalised and effective way?"



MAKING MORE OF LEARNING CONTENT

Let's take content first. Content is something that we know a lot about in our personal lives. We are constantly attached to it (I think it's fair to say a fair few of us are obsessed with it). It's in our pocket all day long and we can't get enough of it - Pinterest, YouTube, Netflix, Spotify, LinkedIn, podcasts, articles, the list goes on. In every single minute, the following is happening:

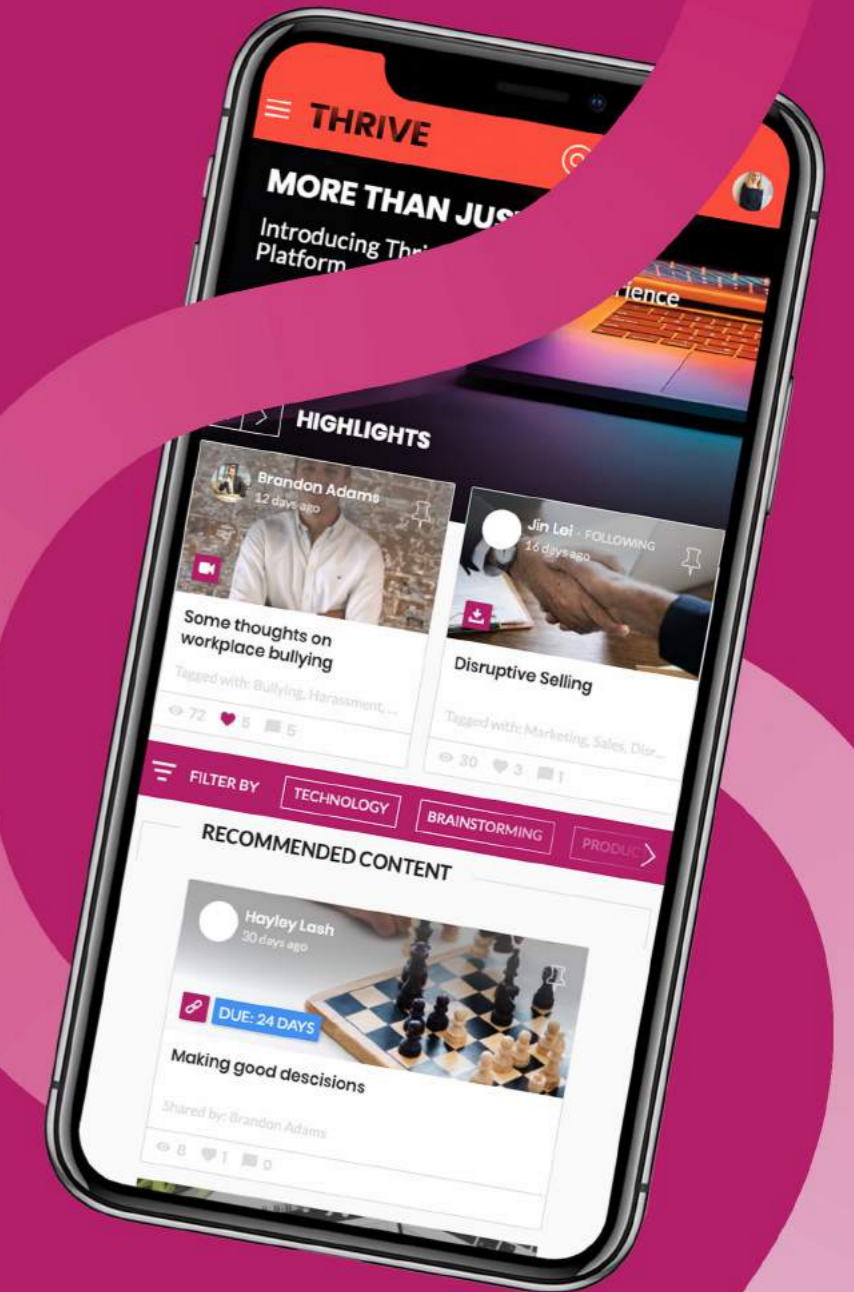
- 300 hours of video consumed on YouTube
- 4.1 million likes on Facebook
- 6.9 million videos watched on Snapchat
- 86,805 hours streamed on Netflix

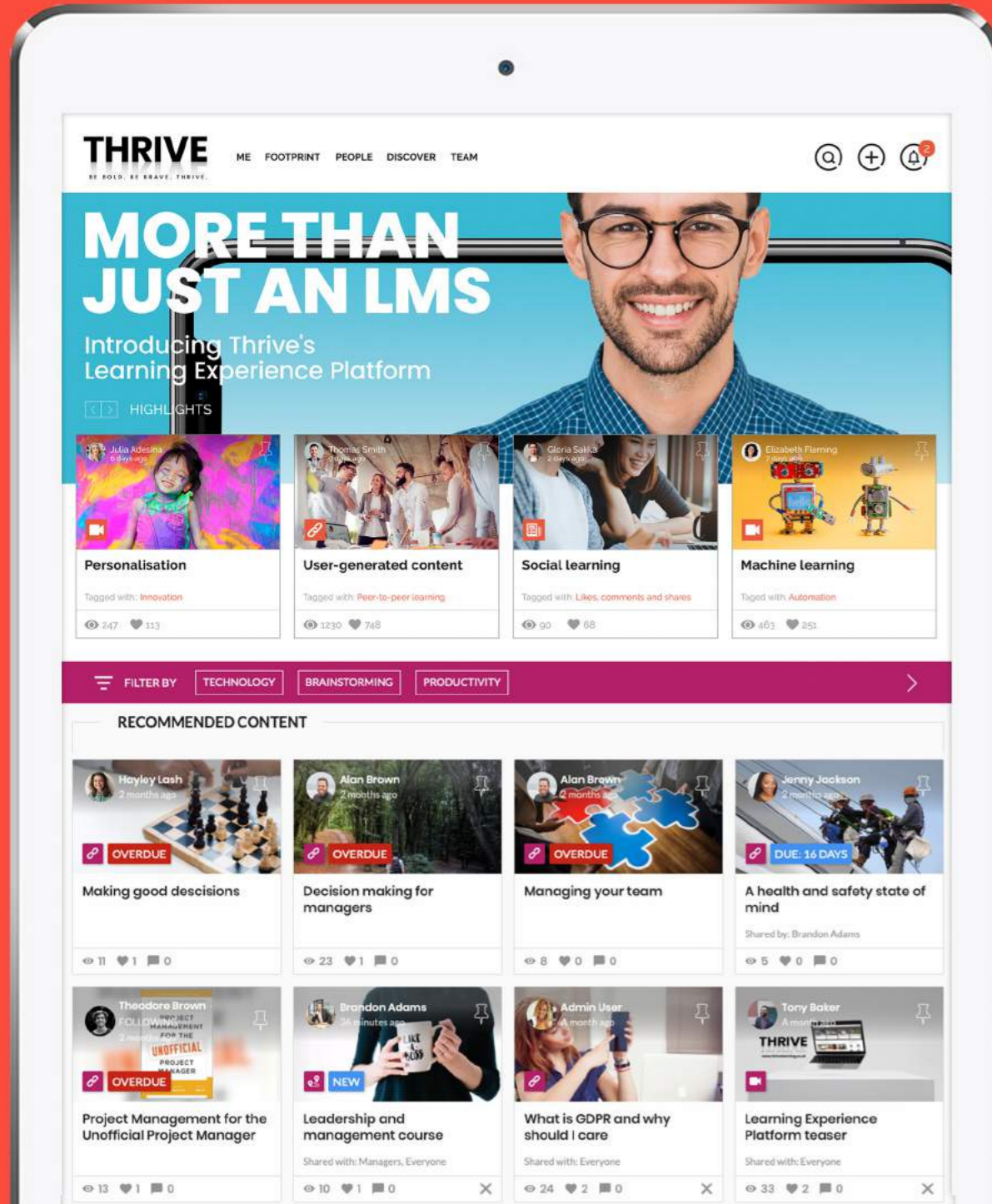
We watch 1 billion hours of YouTube a day! More than Facebook and Netflix combined, YouTube has 1.9bn users per month - that's $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population! I can't believe that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population logs into YouTube each month. If you actually look at how many people have internet in the world as well this increases to 60% of that population.

That's a lot of information and a whole boatload of content. So the key here, in my opinion, is once we recognise that a large part of learning is just content, which we're all very familiar with, we can begin to build better solutions for our teams.

What does that look like? Now, this is where technology can help.

Here are some ideas.





1. Simplify experiences with single platforms

Some of the most successful learning cultures I've seen have done away with their siloed systems and used one platform for both learning, communications and intranet type stuff (policies, procedures and more operational resources.) After all, it's all just content, whether it be an update from comms, a how-to video, or a policy document.

Consumption of content in this way is very familiar to us in our personal lives - we don't have separate YouTube sites for learning, entertainment, cat videos etc. It's all in one place, but personalised so well to us and coupled with such a powerful search that we don't even really notice.

By merging these things together in this way, you're simplifying the user experience; they get used to relying on the platform daily, all which ensuring learning is tightly coupled together and right there for the user when they need it. For example, imagine I'm looking at an expense claim form which I found online but I'm not sure how to fill it in, then sitting there next to it is a 'how to claim expenses' video. Easy!

2. Shake up your content strategy - or get one!

In the subject of content, get some and get a lot of it. This is another prime example of where technology falls down - shiny new beautiful platforms and absolutely no stuff for people to look at. But at the same time, generating all this content is a massive task for L&D. The only way to do it effectively is not to worry so much and to move away from more traditional methods. Embrace external, web-based content, use every tool you have, share content and resources with other people and **don't always feel the need to make everything bespoke.** This is a really good demonstration of one of the areas where we need to let go.

That said, even curating content can take a lot of time and you need to know where to look, so you might want to look at some auto-curation tools to help you out a bit here as well.

3. Provide consumer-grade experiences

Bringing our content in line with how we experience it in our personal lives is one thing, but it also needs to be presented to people in a way which is familiar.

First things first, it's got to look good - we're competing with the Instagrams of the world here. It's got to be personalised, easily accessible on mobile and have a killer search. There's no point having all this lovely content if you don't give it a good home and people can't find it.

But, if you can do all this, you're really getting to a place where you're essentially creating an internal Google and it truly becomes a one stop shop for anything an employee would want to know about. And that's where we really need to be trying to get to.

BETTER CONNECT PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE

So what about people? How can we use technology to better support people learning from each other and creating more human connections?

I'm not going to harp on too much about what social learning is, but I will say what it's not.

Social learning is not a controlled, sectioned off part of an online course which includes a forum for people to discuss what they've learned

and it's not something that can be put to one side and ticked off a checklist.

Social interactions are so innately embedded in human life that **the concept of having a place where I go to 'do' social learning seems wildly illogical.** So why is it that I still hear phrases like 'Social Learning Module', 'Add-on', 'Plug-in' from so many providers, which to me suggests there is a single place you go to 'complete' social learning and more importantly, it's separate from where you do your 'non-social' learning. This is not how life works, not how people behave and not what we recognise. Now I know something we do recognise...



1. Support user-generated content (UGC)

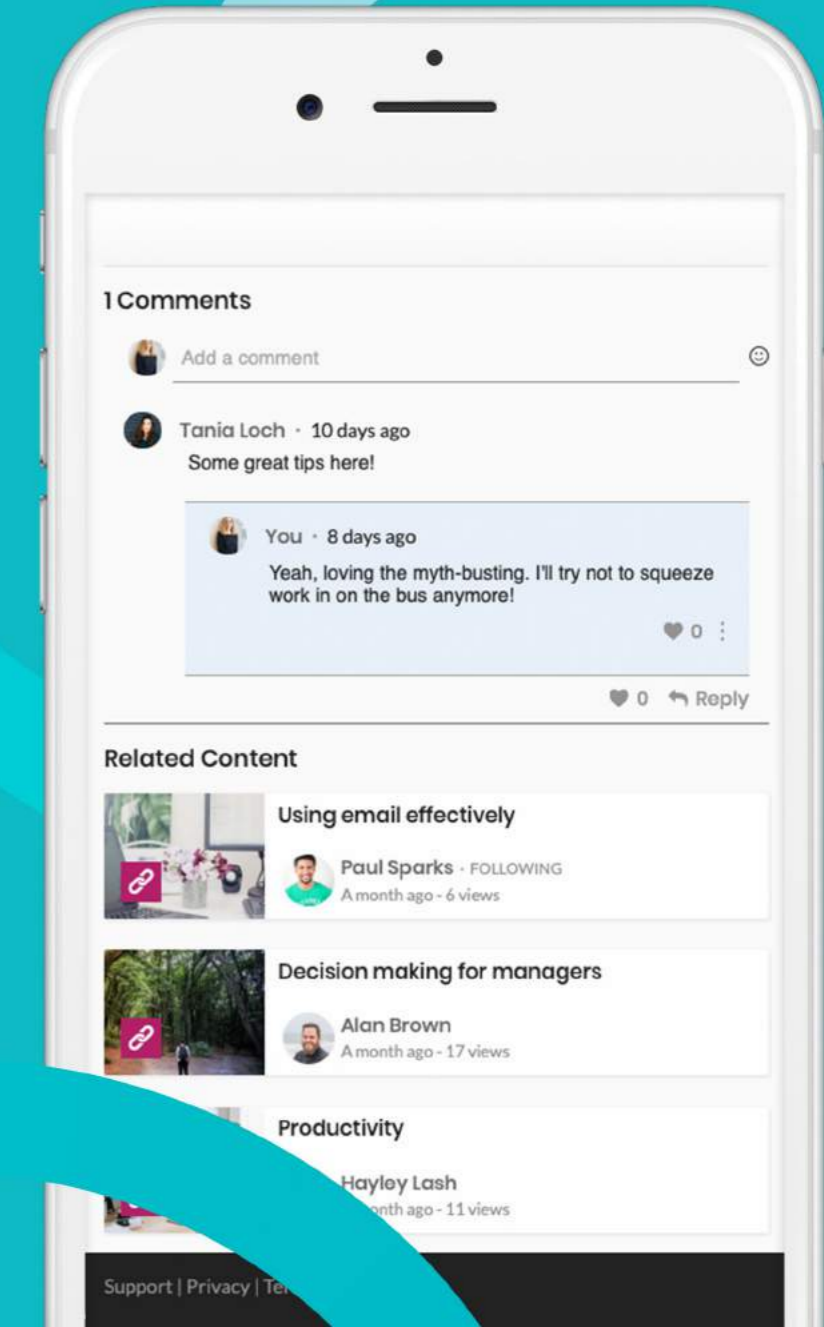
92% of people are more likely to trust a recommendation from another person over branded/official content. And this isn't just people they know, this is any random person. This is why things like reviews and user-uploaded photos of products are so important to us, we trust them more as they have no alternate motive.

UGC can be really powerful. There is so much amazing knowledge in the heads of your employees, it needs to be let free! I'm sure you all have that one person in your team that you think: "If they got hit by a bus tomorrow, we'd be absolutely screwed!" This is what UGC can help protect you from and gives employees some real practical control over their learning.

Also, if you look at it selfishly, it's also really going to help you with all that content you suddenly need to build too - your teams will do some of it for you. Cheers guys!

User-generated content is one of the biggest steps you can take towards modernising your learning culture as it sends a very clear message that you are embracing change.

Managers can suddenly communicate instantly with their teams, people can ask people questions and get quick answers and people can, at last, share all the knowledge that's been bottled inside them.



2. FOSTER AND SUPPORT HUMAN CONNECTIONS

A really interesting area we've been looking into recently is how we can use technology to better connect people. Now I'm not talking about just online, I'm also talking about in the real world. How can we simply get people to talk more?

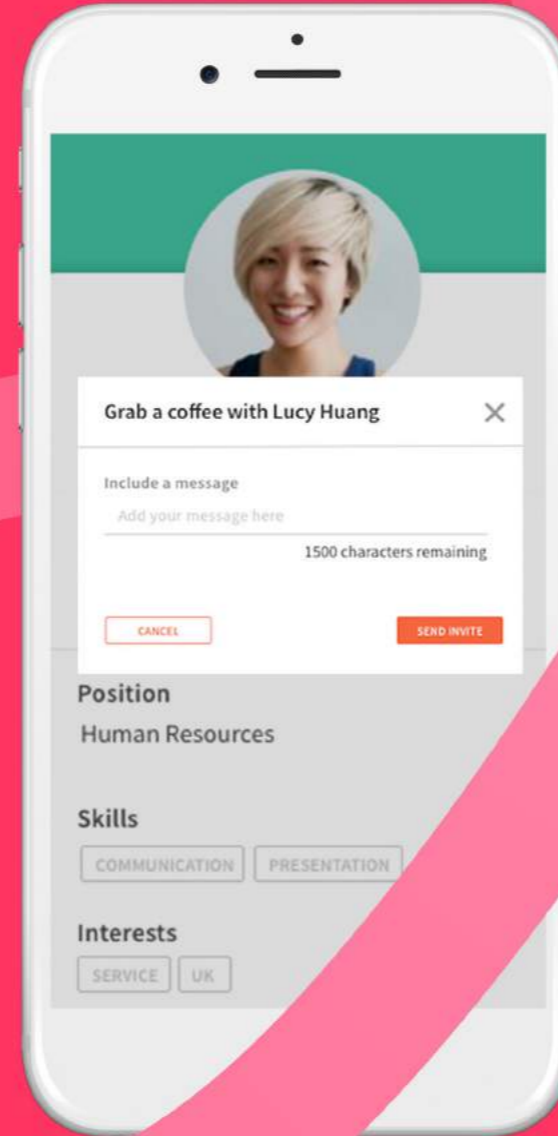
Last year I had my first experience working for a very large organisation - 70,000 people. It was huge! And as a result, I really struggled to grow my network, know who to go to and who could help. I just didn't know where the knowledge sat in the business and had no way to find out other than asking people. I think this is a real problem for a lot of businesses and this is definitely one area where technology can help.

This is something that can be done in many ways but I'm going to share how we've approached it in our LXP to provide some inspiration. We have created tools which allow users to search for certain skills and it will suggest recommended people. They can also search for people by name and choose to follow them if they like - much like you would on Instagram. The idea is that we allow people to find people at the point of need - i.e. 'I need a PM for a project I'm running', but also to seek out experts to help mentor them in their areas of interest.

We've taken this one step further however and have included a 'grab a coffee feature' which literally allows employees to ask someone for a coffee. As simple as that is, we're hoping is that this little button might actually prompt more people to connect in the real world, face-to-face and encourage things like mentoring, coaching and cross-departmental working.

I've had clients in the past do this manually as well, one of my client's HR department used to send out monthly matching emails which randomly matched 2 employees in the business and it pretty much just said 'Hey, you 2 should meet!' As simple as that.

I think it's a great example of how we can be using technology to increase collaboration, without trying to do everything online.



3. BETTER UNDERSTAND

LEARNER MOTIVATION



Right, so what we've looked at so far is how we need to reposition learning in our own minds before rolling this out to the business, and indeed how to use content to connect people, but what do we do if our audience doesn't come on this journey with us?

This brings us to the third element of this culture change journey we've embarked on. Motivation. How do we encourage people to embrace this new approach? They may be very familiar with it at home, but people's attitude at work and at home can be different.

It's the biggest cliché, but you need to take the time to understand your audience and what makes them tick.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

Take a moment to think about what motivates you to learn and I mean all learning - in your personal lives and at work.

Some people want to get ahead in their career which can be linked to security and financial gain. Some people are more interested in becoming a respected expert, a thought leader people look up to. Others are genuinely motivated by helping others and making others' lives better. Then you've just got good old fashioned curiosity. Technically every time you ask someone a question you are learning something and we definitely need more of this in the world. And finally, let's not forget our old friend, fear - if I don't do this I'm going to fall behind and lose my job.

Understanding motivation is super important, but how do we do this?

1. Ask People

Hello Captain Obvious! I'm saying it anyway - this is the best, most practical advice I can give, so here we go!

For the love of all that is good and holy, ask people what they want! This seems like the most ridiculous thing to be saying, but you might be surprised how little it is done.

I was working with a company a few years ago designing a marketing programme and they truly didn't understand why I wanted to talk to the people in the marketing team to find out what they felt they needed and where their gaps were. Don't give me this *'they don't know what they don't know'* rubbish. They know at least some things they need!

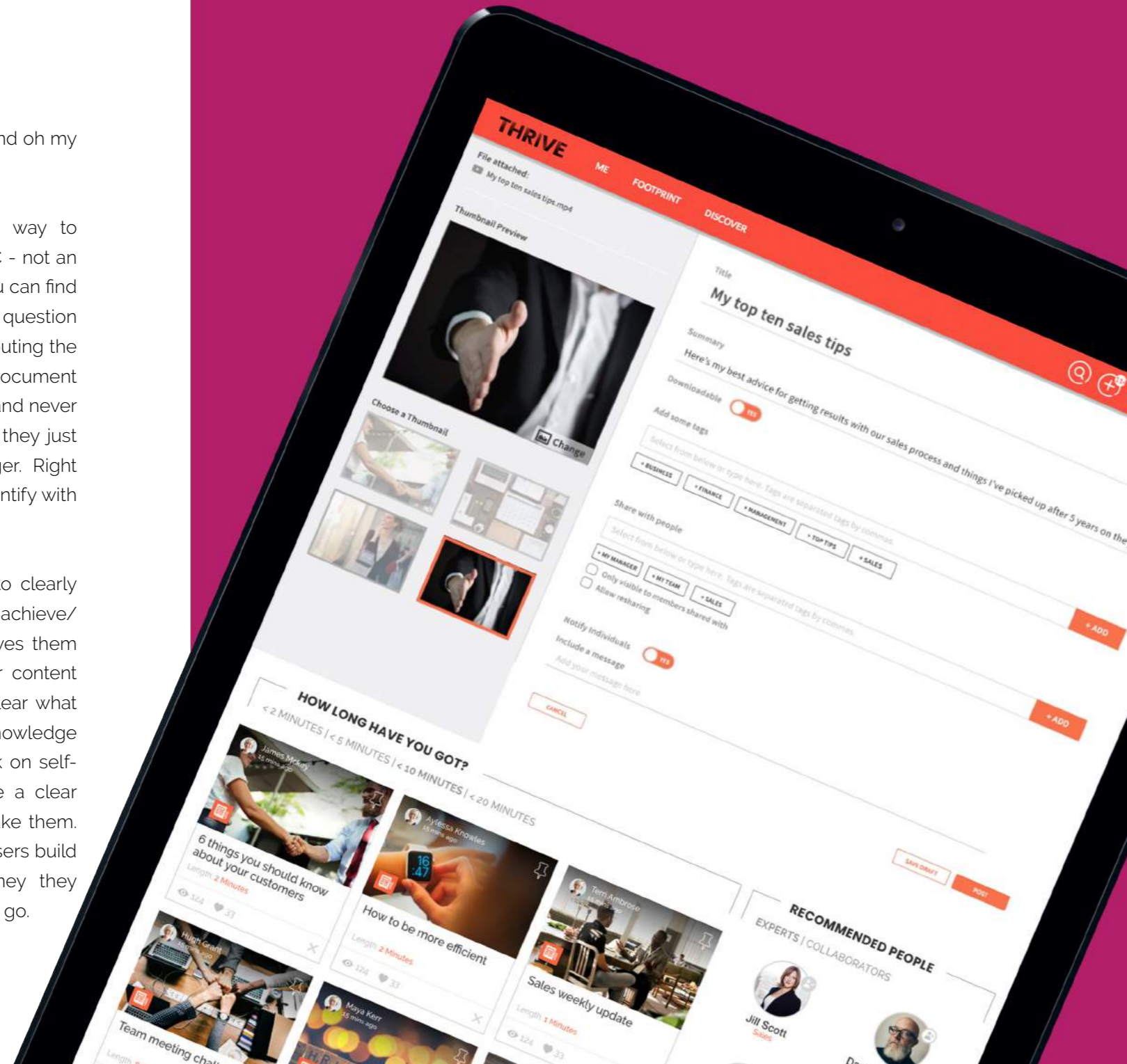
This goes across the board, but particularly when trying to implement anything new - tech, process etc. If you can survey, interview, use focus groups, whatever you can do to better understand who your audience is and what their real problems are and what motivates them, you'll find the change management process much smoother.

2. MAKE IT REAL

Which brings me onto making it real and oh my goodness is this an easy sell.

An example of this could be your way to convince people to start creating UGC - not an easy thing to do sometimes - but if you can find that person that gets asked the same question 5 times a week and is truly tired of spouting the same information/sharing the same document and tell them that they can save time and never need to answer that question again if they just share it on platform x, game changer. Right there, you have clearly been able to identify with a problem and provided a solution.

Another way to make things real is to clearly link content to what they want to achieve/ whatever motivates them. If what drives them is development then make sure your content is structured in a way that makes it clear what role they could do with this new knowledge they acquire. For someone to embark on self-directed learning, they need to have a clear understanding as to where it could take them. Build pathways or even let your end users build pathways which represent the journey they need to take to get where they want to go.



3. TRUST IS NECESSARY FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

And trust. The classic one.

Again, seems obvious, but is very underused. Let it go. People aren't going to do anything weird. The worst thing you can do is implement all these new ways of doing things with a layer of moderation or restrictions over the top. Imagine if someone vetted all your Facebook posts, you just wouldn't use it.

Give people time to explore, let them set their own path and encourage self-directed learning. For example, with my old team, I used to give them one day a week for self-directed learning so they could try things out and learn new skills. Honestly, the best things came out of this, which not only benefited them but benefitted the business.

If you really want to encourage a real, organisation-wide learning culture, you will need to carve out time so they can get on board. Otherwise, it'll just be seen as something else they need to do/another platform to deal with.

4. CREATE A BUZZ



So now we have the right content and have spent some time understanding our people, we need to promote and drive these changes forward. You've probably already heard this a lot, but it's true that in order to be successful L&D is needing to behave more like marketing. You cannot approach what's essentially change management by sending out a few emails, no matter how good your products are and your understanding of your people.

That's a bit like Apple bringing out a new product with no research about their end users, conducting no testing, and doing absolute zero advertising or marketing. It just wouldn't happen. We need to be treating anything that affects our employees in the same way we would treat our customers. There's no way you'd roll out a new product to your customers without doing these things.

We need to be getting out into the business to promote change. So how do we do this?

1. DEVELOP BUY-IN FROM STAKEHOLDERS

The first, and often most argued, important thing which can help with change is developing buy-in.

70% of change management projects fail and culture is often cited as the number one reason for this. There's often so much focus on the technical and process deliverables, that the people and the culture are forgotten.

Developing buy-in seems like an obvious one, but 72% of all failures in change management are put down to getting this wrong - whether it be from resistance from managers or employees. When it comes to developing buy-in, the message from the top must be consistent and senior leadership must be invested in the change, for real. They have to be in it, not just saying they are. Practice what we preach and all that.

Managers, they're often the worst group. They need to be given more ownership of change, rather than just passing down messages. For example, if you want your learners to be completing more self-directed learning, their manager needs to be allowing them time for this, supporting this and encouraging this, rather than saying 'that's not important, do this instead.'

Get in the trenches to build advocates

Going back to motivation, we need to really find out about our managers and work closely with them to get them on side. I'm talking literal one to ones here. You'd be amazed how much good a ten minute conversation can do compared to twenty emails. In the past, when I've been trying to convince people to change a behaviour, I've literally had to sit down with them, find out their problems and show them how this new thing can really help them. They'd come in sceptics and leave advocates, also feeling much more included. You don't even necessarily need to do this with every person as once you get a few on side, it will spread.

If you can get even a handful of people genuinely excited about what you're doing, it can be really powerful. But don't force this on people, provide the opportunity to become champions, invest time in getting people excited and position it as a great thing to help them extend their network/add another string to their bow.

As soon as you start appointing people, adding objectives into their plans, the intrinsic motivation disappears - even if they did want to do it in the first place. By all means, put policies in place to help - such as development days/hours etc. as discussed earlier, but don't set targets.

Finally on buy-in, the easiest one, in my opinion, grab people early. Give them an amazing onboarding experience which indoctrinates them to the ways of working and as they're keen at the start of their new role, they will get involved and it will become the norm to them. In one of my previous companies, on every person's first day, we would take a video of them just saying who they are etc. and would share it across the business. Was a great way to welcome people and make everyone seem more human and as it's done on their first day, no one objected and it sent a clear message that video communication was something we do.

2. COMMUNICATE CONTINUOUSLY

Taking another page out of the book of marketing, communicate more than you think necessary. This all starts with the vision and really selling why you're trying to do whatever it is you're doing. You have to get hearts and minds on your side.

Linking back to our consumer-grade experiences, market to your users like you would your customers. Don't just send out a boring 1000 word email, create a fun video, do something more inspirational, create teaser trailers, make cake, whatever you need to do to get people genuinely excited about it. And if you do make a video, don't just film your CEO sitting behind a desk spouting out the party line. Use real employees, make it relevant and make something which will go viral (there's loads of advice online about how to make viral videos, btw).

Once you're into the thick of the change/project, celebrate wins. It's all about communicating the positive messages and behaviours and separately addressing more negative grumblings. So if you find an individual or team have really been demonstrating whatever it is you're looking for - say, sharing their knowledge online - make sure you shout about it. People are naturally a bit competitive, curious and have severe FOMO (fear of missing out) at times. But you and your team have to stay strong and stay positive, as it will be challenging. The only thing which will make it succeed is your tenacious passion and enthusiasm; trust me, it will be infectious.

Finally, make your communication relevant. Again, this comes back to how we're marketed to in our personal lives; it's so personalised just for us that it is actually much less annoying than it used to be. There are loads of great resources online which will teach you about content marketing and how to run a campaign, but this is essentially what you need to do.

For example, if I was trying to encourage more people to self direct their learning and I know there's a group of users who are interested in learning about design, I might ping them a YouTube series about design and simply say 'Hey, did you know this was here?'

You and your team have to stay strong and stay positive, as it will be challenging. The only thing which will make it succeed is your tenacious passion and enthusiasm; trust me, it will be infectious.



3. BENCHMARK AND MEASURE IMPACT OVER TIME

Imagine you've ploughed in loads of time and energy into an initiative, you've talked to people, you've changed your approach and upskilled the team but then you don't really have any way of measuring the impact. For me, that would be totally demoralising. Data collection and measuring what we're doing is all part of being curious and is essential to creating more curiosity in your organisation.

Before you start any project, in particular one that requires a culture change, do some benchmarking. Get some surveys out there to better understand how people currently feel, collect data when you interview, look at existing data sources, like employee engagement, happiness scores, NPS scores, even sales or any other metric you have.

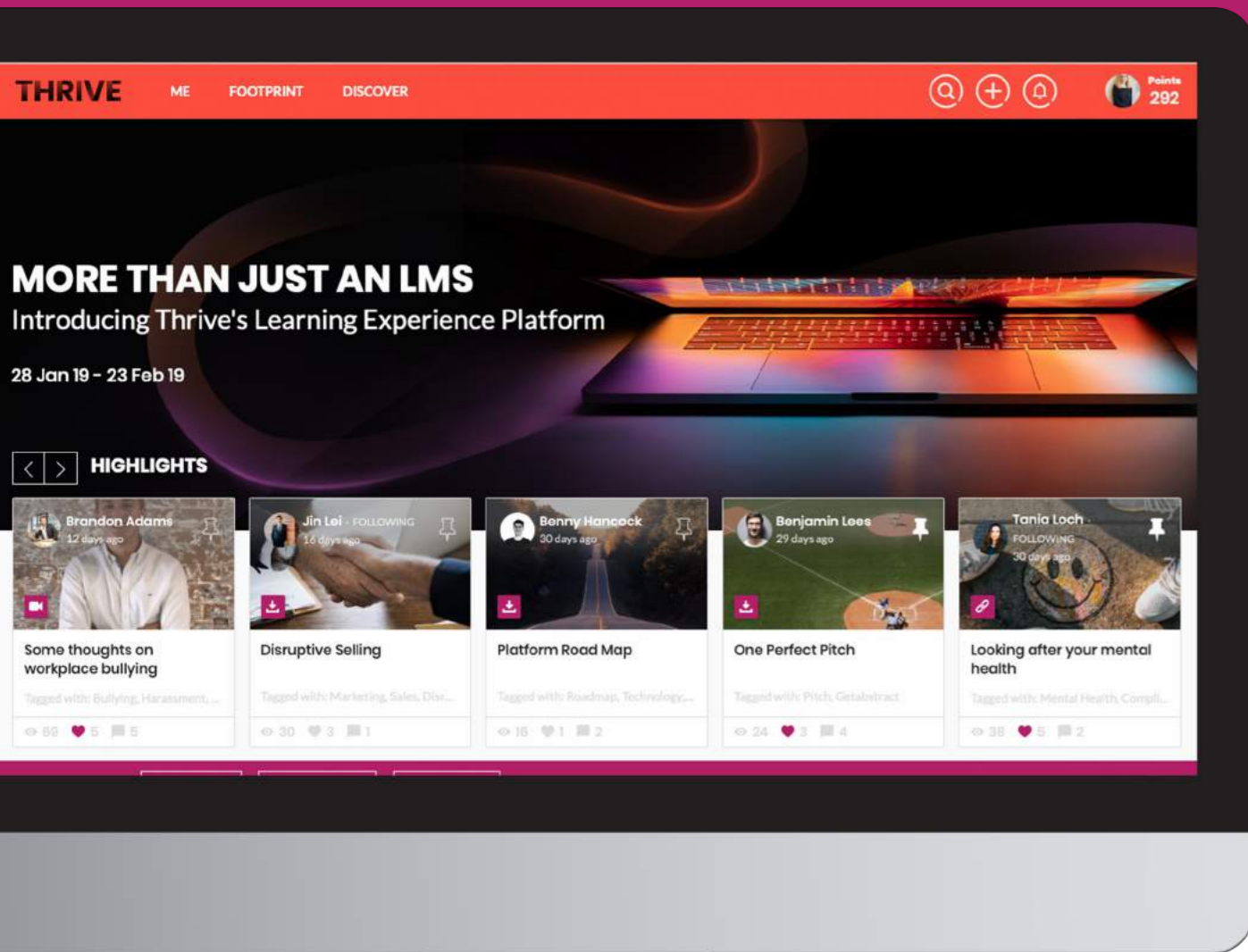
Not doing benchmarking is a bit like not taking a before photo of a house renovation, but still expecting people to be wowed when they see what you've done. Think about all the hours scraping wallpaper, pulling up carpets, glossing skirting boards, all for someone to say 'yeah, it's nice.' You put in the work, you should be able to impress people. Equally, you need to be able to monitor and track impact over time (but failures and successes) in order to iterate and continuously improve.

I think sometimes people don't do these things as they're worried that by using data, they might reveal things they'd rather keep hidden. I understand this. I would hate to work hard on a project only to show it's made no difference, but at least we can see what went wrong and improve.

This is why it's also important to track and measure as you go and adapt based on your findings. Maybe you've rolled out a campaign and the first touch point was a video. Most people who watched it only watched the first 20 seconds. This is great feedback to allow you adapt. This is partly why we've included a campaigns feature in our LXP, so you can schedule as many campaigns as you like, run them automatically and then track how well they've been received. There's lots of tools out there that can help you though and if you're interested to find out more [our Chief Marketing Officer, Ashley, did a webinar on this exact subject.](#)



CHANGING CULTURES IS HARD, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE



The reality is, evolving your learning culture is a really challenging task, but it's also a necessary one. We're suffering from endemic levels of employee apathy, disconnection and frustration with access to information. We know what our learners want and need in order to better engage with the business - so why aren't we giving it to them?

Sometimes the hardest things are the most rewarding - so get out there and start understanding what is it your learners want. Remember, changing cultures is for long-term gains, not short term wins; the change will be worth it, I promise.

If you want to learn how a Learning Experience Platform could support you in changing your learning culture, why not get access to a free on-demand demo now?



THRIVE
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