

Healthy Lifelong Learners

How Vodafone enabled employees to take control of their careers



WITH MORE THAN 500 MILLION mobile customers, 150k employees and operated networks in 25 countries, the Vodafone Group plc qualifies as the 4th telecommunications company in the world in terms of market value, with \$48.39 billion as of February 2019. Despite such numbers and size, **Vodafone is also renowned globally as a leading innovator, always ready to embrace and even anticipate change, and one might argue that this specific trait is key to Vodafone's lasting success.** In a time of technological revolution

and digital transformation, innovation is an attitude that might turn threats into opportunities, if only people are trained and equipped to foster the right mindset. Consistently, Vodafone is a leading innovator when it comes to L&D too.

In 2019, Vodafone set another fundamental milestone in their L&D revolution, when the Vodafone University – a digital learning space for employees across all the 25 countries – **opened its doors to external learning contents from all over the web.** But let's go back to the beginning of this story and see how that happened.

📶 At the end of 2017, Vodafone Italy boasts one of the most innovative and energetic L&D structures of the whole Vodafone Group. Several initiatives are launched by the headquarters in Milan in order to promote the cultural shift from top-down, traditional directive teaching to bottom-up learning, with the end goal to embrace change and be a pioneer company in the digital era. **Digital transformation champions are encouraged to show up and train their colleagues on the job, or by means of selecting and even creating learning contents for them.** Jam Sessions are arranged in order to walk teams through specific topics, ranging from cutting edge tools and technologies to brand new processes and methodologies.



Francesco Porotto, Digital Learning Manager at Vodafone Italy

“We realized that they were actually struggling to find the right information at the right time across the internet”

In order to spread such messages and engage their employees, **Vodafone Italy launches My Learning, an enterprise social network meant to share internal news, information and events with the workplace community.** A very strong starting point indeed, but Francesco Porotto, former Digital Learning Manager at Vodafone Italy, understands very soon that there's a critical ingredient missing in the receipt: long story short, this is all about content. “At that time – Francesco explains – we were creating a coherent and well-balanced ecosystem – both online and offline – where people had the concrete chance to drive the change within the organization and be acknowledged and rewarded for doing that.

That was an amazing achievement but looking closer we realized that they were actually struggling to find the right information at the right time across the internet, before they could even think about learning and spreading that knowledge. We weren't helping, yet. **There was an ocean of contents out there, and we just let them sail their own homemade boat. We had to do something. We had to take care of them”.**

More specifically, the problem statement sounds something like: **how can we organize and classify web learning contents from 3rd parties and make them searchable within MyLearning, in order to help our**

employees find and share information? The answer is provided by OfCourseMe, which can make its real time aggregation, classification and search capabilities available via API. It's the summer of 2018, and the very idea of a vertical search engine for learning injected directly into the customer's platform looks pioneering. **“The project was very innovative, with open questions that might have sounded scary then – Francesco admits – but we knew that was the right direction, whilst the API integration looked light, seamless, with no cost of switch, in continuity with the steps we'd taken before”.** Vodafone Italy decides to go ahead at full steam, and after 8 weeks only from the project kickoff, in November 2018 100k free online content are easily searchable within My Learning, which is now rebranded as My Learning Plus. “That “plus” was not just a sign – Francesco remembers – it made all the difference in how our bottom-up learning strategy was perceived, because it clearly showed our colleagues that the organization was walking the walk together with them”.

The Italian experiment is a huge success. “Within the first 5 month after the launch – Francesco explains – almost 500 external contents were found and chosen via My Learning Plus, which means that one out of three employees with access to the service played at least one content: this was way beyond our expectations”. Moreover, users engagement grows steadily over time: employees get more and more familiar with the tool, which becomes part of their weekly routine. But there's much more. **Employees usage patterns become valuable indicator of learning needs within the organization.** “Data and stats provided by OfCourseMe are priceless –



9 MONTHS AFTER THE LAUNCH

100k

Employees
involved

12k

Online courses
started

6

Learning hours
per employee



Francesco says. For example, we expected our employees to focus on digital transformation related hard skills such as coding or digital marketing, but we found out that the top trending topic is leadership, followed by project management. This gave us food for thought at all levels: we now know that we need to work harder on processes and soft skills, which is a critical input not only for the L&D team but for the whole management”.

While Vodafone Italy is an early adopter, the Vodafone Global Enterprise in the UK proves to be at least as brave very soon. Only a few weeks after the launch in Italy, Francesco Porotto presents the service at the headquarters in London, Paddington. Catalina Schveninger, former Global Head of Learning, and Nick Denholm, Global Digital Learning Manager, are both stricken by the project, and there’s a very specific reason for that. “Francesco knew that we were struggling with his very same issue - Nick says – except ours was tougher”. While Vodafone Italy has its own learning space, Vodafone Global provides other 24 local branches with a unique learning platform named Vodafone University, in 10 different languages. “Vodafone has internally produced courses as well as user generated contents – Nick explains - hence one might not expect us to have a problem with content, **but with so many different countries and languages we often end up with no content available in a given language for a specific topic, despite our huge efforts and investments**”. The challenge might look much tougher for OfCourseMe too, since on top of the content in 10 different languages there need to be classification and search capabilities working well in those languages.

However, the infrastructure and technology are the same, hence with a few tweaks and turns the machine is ready: challenge accepted.

🍷 As for Vodafone Italy in 2018, it takes 2 months from the kickoff of the project to the go-live in the spring of 2019. “Francesco made us very confident – Nick comments – but I have to admit that we were worried by the complexity of the multi-language integration: looking backward, there was no need to worry at all.” But when the Vodafone University open its doors to external online content on May 11th, **the spotlight is on another big difference between the two implementations: the size of the organization.**

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While My Learning Plus is accessible to 1500 employees in Italy, the Vodafone University is open for 100k+ employees all over the world. “We stress-tested the infrastructure during the development phase – Nick clarifies – but we were still holding our breath on that day: we didn’t even know what kind of reactions and feedback we could expect”. Everything goes smooth,



Nick Denholm, Head of Online Learning Technologies and Capabilities, Vodafone

and the early metrics are impressive: “I remember that 5 days after the launch we were already counting 15k searches – Nick says – and we hadn’t communicated the news to all the countries yet”. After 6 months,

the results are much more telling and graspable: 500k searches, almost 10k contents seen, loads of positive feedbacks. Plus, as in Italy, some important so-whats for Nick and his team: “searches and content fruitions are very well distributed both by topic and by geography: this confirms that our colleagues all over the world are enthusiastic, avid learners, and we can’t focus on some languages, some topic only. Content is king, and if we want to provide them with a meaningful and complete learning experience, the solution we implemented is headed in the right direction”. As Nick implies, this is just the beginning of a quite long journey. New features and improvements will follow, with the goal to make bottom-up learning the new normal, hence giving Vodafone the opportunity to embrace change and evolve as fast as never before with huge benefits both for the organization and its employees.



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