

# Open Learning: an educational ecosystem with a focus on people



**I**N MARCH 2020, THE COLLABORATION between Sky Italia and OfCourseMe turned two. This symbolic anniversary would be enough on its own to highlight the roots and depth of this success story, and above all, this top Italian company's propensity for L&D innovation. Back in spring 2018, it expanded its already well-established continuous self-training programme for employees to include the wealth of online content aggregated by OfCourseMe. But first things first.

Founded in 2003, Sky Italia quickly established itself as the country's leading pay-TV platform. With over 5 million subscribers and around 5,000 employees, today it is a vital member of the Sky Limited group, which has a total of 23 million members and 31,000 employees worldwide. Quickly adopting a central role on the national scene, since its inception it has consistently succeeded in facing the innovator's challenge: to constantly stay one step ahead of the competition, having established itself from the outset as a breath of fresh air in a consolidated context.

On closer inspection, based on a pattern shared by other innovative companies in other verticals, it turns out that a strategic approach to innovation pure and simple invariably corresponds to a strong innovative spirit in company training too. Nobody is saying the latter unilaterally causes the former, but they certainly reinforce each other in a culture characterised by very low resistance to change.

♥ In 2018, Sky Italia was already in the advanced phase of a path of profound cultural transformation, which aimed to increasingly empower employees and truly place them at the centre of the project. On the one hand, this involves practices like smart working, which impact on daily working habits, and on the other hand self-training, which aims to offer employees the opportunity to design their own upskilling and reskilling paths independently. If employees can learn to cope with change proactively, then they can be autonomous, and vice versa. In other words, the drive towards continuous innovation can only find a fundamental ally in continuous self-learning, to maintain a competitive advantage.

**“Despite the apparent unknowns, the service OfCourseMe offers is surprisingly simple.”**

Sky employees have had access to a modern and personalised training environment since 2017: Open Learning, a custom version of Moodle fully adapted to Sky's needs. Here they can find a series of video courses and "capsules", or mini-units, produced by Sky or through collaboration with external partners, in line with its high editorial standards. Each employee can choose which content to add to their plan, following discussion with their line manager when necessary, based on skill gap analysis and their objectives. The L&D department still offers a structured process, so as not to deprive colleagues of all their points of reference, but we are already well ahead in the process. The Achilles heel that has emerged, however, is how fast some content needs to be updated or created, given the continuous specific innovation in certain areas and competencies, especially hard skills. "We'd built a complete and coherent ecosystem, which apparently suited our colleagues well," explains Luciana Di



Luciana Di Paolo, HR Learning Manager, Sky Italia

Paolo, Learning Manager at Sky Italia. "But then they started telling us that whenever they needed to learn more about a topic we had no proprietary content for, whether it was a programming language or the latest technological invention, they'd usually leave Open Learning, spend a lot of time – too much time – looking for something else, then follow a MOOC on Coursera, edX or Udacity that wasn't tracked and therefore recognised, just disappearing into thin air." At the start of 2018, Sky Italia was looking for a way to integrate MOOCs and other external sources into Open Learning.

♥ The opportunity presented itself when OfCourseMe, right on cue, knocked on Luciana's door. OfCourseMe already had the technology necessary to aggregate the content Sky needed and make it available via API, but putting everything into Sky's custom Moodle required unprecedented system integration. Alta Formazione colleagues who had developed the first version of Open Learning got involved: it would be the first in a long line of collaborations between the two companies. In fact, despite the apparent unknowns, the service OfCourseMe offers is surprisingly simple. One function to run real-time text or category searches through the OfCourseMe search engine, another to load the course tab with all the metadata, and one more to save the content in your training plan. Voilà. Within 8 weeks, the first integration of OfCourseMe's functions within Moodle had become reality. Almost overnight, Sky could now offer its workforce 12,000 new titles, covering endless topics, and integrating the internal

## Data after 18 months of use

5k

People  
involved

50k

Searches  
made

20

Hours of  
training/employee



catalogue, which nevertheless remains prominent as it is fully customised for Sky.

From the go-live in September 2018 to the time of writing, 18 months have passed. During this time, the three-way partnership between Sky Italia, OfCourseMe and Alta Formazione has continued to bear fruit, with new features, new sources and new formats constantly being added. Over this period, the results have been remarkable. "From the very start, thanks to a communication campaign that made use of the constant support from OfCourseMe," explains Luciana, "many of our colleagues have consistently used the new service, racking up over 20,000 searches in the first quarter (to date, there have been approximately 50,000 – editor's note). But the longer-term performance has been even more solid: a substantial hard core of users has kept using the service without dropping out over time, while each subsequent communication has enabled us to involve new users, who have then

stratified. Today, Open Learning is a habit rooted in many of our colleagues' routines: exactly what we hoped to achieve." The multiple interactions employees have with the service entail a dual benefit: as well as engaging colleagues with the service itself, the L&D department now has a great deal more analytical information on the most critical topics to tackle, which sources catch on best in the company, and which formats best meet Sky's needs. In a virtuous circle, as users interact with the platform, content can therefore be optimised to improve engagement. "I'm truly impressed," explains Luciana, "by how simple and immediate it is for us to make decisions to improve the service: the data's clear, it's easy to take action." Luciana also has very clear ideas about future prospects. "What we're achieving is a cultural transformation that by definition is slow, chipping away bit by bit; but we think it's the right recipe, made up of tools, communication and new routines, and we're convinced we have the right set-up and the right partners to take it forward long-term."



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