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How to Spot and Develop Your Workplace Influencers



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The Rise of the Workplace Influencer

Influencers are everywhere. Social media has given rise to micro-influencers – trusted voices who shape behaviours, trends, and opinions. But what about inside our organisations? Who are the influencers shifting workplace culture, and how can we harness their impact to drive innovation and change?

Unlike champions or sponsors, workplace influencers don't push an agenda. They don't hold formal authority, yet their words and actions carry weight. They simplify complexity, ask the right questions, and shape the conversations that matter. Organisations that recognise and empower these individuals stand to gain a significant advantage in engagement, learning, and innovation.

Champions vs. Influencers: What's the Difference?

Champions are intentional advocates – they have a mission and are incentivised to drive specific change. Influencers, however, emerge organically. Their power lies in their credibility and authenticity. People trust them not because they have to, but because they want to. This distinction is crucial when considering how learning, collaboration, and engagement spread within an organisation.

While champions push formal training and initiatives, influencers naturally create micro-learning moments – bite-sized, relevant, and engaging. They make complex ideas digestible, drive meaningful conversations, and create psychological safety for dissent and innovation.



The Psychology of Influence: What Makes Someone an Influencer?

Influence isn't about position – it's about behaviour. Workplace influencers share key traits that make them effective:

- **Simplifiers:** They distil complex ideas into clear, actionable insights.
- **Authentic Communicators:** Their voice is trusted because it's real, unfiltered, and relevant.
- **Storytellers:** They create meaning through narratives that resonate.
- **Question Askers:** They challenge assumptions and bring hidden issues to the surface.
- **Connectors:** They bridge teams, ideas, and perspectives.
- **Dissenters (in a constructive way):** They call things out and invite discussion, not disruption.

The Future of Workplace Influence: Social, Digital, and AI?

Influence isn't new – it's existed since humans first gathered around fires, passed stories through generations, and debated around water coolers. But the medium has changed. Internal social media, platforms like Viva Engage or LinkedIn Learning, and even AI-driven influencers are emerging as new ways to shape workplace behaviours. The question is: How do we ensure these tools enable, rather than control, influence?

Organisations need to strike a balance between structure and freedom. Too much structure stifles innovation, while too much freedom creates noise and inefficiency. Workplace influencers thrive in environments where they have the psychological safety to challenge, but also clear boundaries that prevent information overload.

The Leadership Opportunity: Leveraging Influencers for Innovation

The most effective leaders recognise that influence isn't just about visibility – it's about credibility. Leaders who align with and empower influencers are seen as more authentic, forward-thinking, and trustworthy. But are organisations truly ready to embrace this?

To enable and develop workplace influencers, organisations must:

- **Identify them:** Look beyond job titles and spot the individuals shaping conversations.
- **Create platforms for influence:** Enable safe spaces for discussion and innovation.
- **Reward and recognise their impact:** Influence is a skill – acknowledge those who do it well.
- **Get senior leaders on board:** Storytelling is key – leaders need to see the value of workplace influencers in driving engagement and change.

The Risk of Ignoring Workplace Influence

If organisations fail to recognise and support their natural influencers, they risk disengagement, resistance to change, and a lack of authentic learning. The alternative? Harnessing influencers to bridge the leadership gap, drive innovation, and create cultures where people feel heard, valued, and empowered to shape the future.

The workplace is evolving. The question is – will we embrace the power of influence, or continue relying on outdated models of change?

