

Case study – Barnardo’s

April 2015

L&D:
Evolving roles,
enhancing skills



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organisations and 17,000 learners have contributed to Towards Maturity's leading benchmarks. Thanks to the support of Towards Maturity's Ambassadors (27 learning organisations), annual benchmarking findings, case studies and resources are available to download for free at www.towardsmaturity.org

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Barnardo's case study

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Organisation summary

Barnardo's is the UK's largest children's charity. Their services help the abused, the most vulnerable, the forgotten and the neglected children across the UK. The charity employs over 8,000 people and 14,000 volunteers who are committed to working to transform the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

A clear vision

Barnardo's has a goal to create and embed a learning culture. As Katharine Bollon, Head of Workforce and Organisation Development, describes:

'By 2025 our CEO, Javed Khan, wants us to be an organisation where learning is an innate part of what we do and how we behave. Where we continually embrace and drive learning at all levels, in all spaces, and in all places – where every day is an opportunity for learning.'

A key component of this way of learning and working will be a *'university; a community of trusted advisers'* – but one not made from bricks and mortar. Instead it will be a virtual university that enables all individuals and teams across the organisation to continually learn, share and challenge each other to improve and innovate:

'This way of thinking strategically, leading and engaging together will fulfil the potential of not just our people but also the potential of the most vulnerable children and young people – our beneficiaries – through the delivery of our innovative services.' **Katharine**

L&D has a clear role to play in achieving this goal:

'The learning function needs to facilitate the dialogue and the design of what our people and beneficiaries need their learning culture to look like. They need to hold up the mirror of what a good learner looks and sounds like, wherever they are in the organisation.' **Katharine**

The IT L&D team

One team really driving forward with this agenda is the IT learning and development team. Led by Lisa Johnson (Assistant Director, Information Services), the team consists of four IT trainers. Collectively they have responsibility for 10,000 IT users, spread across 1,900 different sites in the UK and Northern Ireland.

Over the past 17 years Lisa has developed the team to embrace learning technology to keep up with changes in the internal and external environment. In particular, over the last five years the organisation has experienced challenges. There have been a number of changes in senior management over the years, alongside the impact of the economic downturn, which has made fundraising more challenging. The organisation has also moved to a new building, resulting in a complete re-architecture of the IT infrastructure.

Responding to business needs

In this context the IT L&D team have developed an adaptable way of working and a continual desire to learn. This began with exploring

how learning technology could be used to increase reach. Lisa started off by introducing e-learning to the organisation, based on her realisation at the time that *'there had to be ways to do this that are simpler than being on the road five nights a week'* and a recognition that the team needed to work differently in response to resource constraints.

From there, virtual classrooms were introduced, and more recently embedded performance support tools:

'Last year we started to dabble in electronic performance embedded support, so we started plugging content into the system so that people can access it in the workflow, rather than going elsewhere.'

The team monitor IT helpdesk calls and emails, meaning that they can quickly spot trends and the issues that people need support with. Alongside this, they maintain a very strong connection with the business, so that they can respond quickly to needs:

'We have adapted our own way that works for us, and that is quite flexible and ad hoc. It's about meeting the needs at the time that the needs are there, rather than spending three months building a programme to be delivered.' **Lisa**

This also reflects Katharine's wider L&D philosophy for the organisation:

'We need to help people to access and apply learning at a point of need when it is most useful and will have impact, which is either when they're at a screen, or when they're out in the field with their teams and clients.'

Shifting roles

Lisa estimates that in the last two years less than 10% of learning delivery has been classroom-based (compared with 25% a few years

ago). This shift in methods has caused Lisa to re-evaluate the team's roles and core purpose:

'Are we here to curate content? Are we here to develop content? Are we here to train people? What I'm finding today is that we're jack of lots of different trades. It's not as simple as being a trainer anymore. ... I could write down nine or ten different hats we're wearing to be able to do what we need to do to deliver performance.'

In answering these questions, one thing is clear; the need to continually evolve:

'Even though we've changed a lot, we need to change again. We're a bit like chameleons. We've got to adapt to the organisation's needs.'

Lisa

Recently the team introduced a new fundraising customer relationship management (CRM) system, which necessitated more change:

'This is another area where our roles have changed. It wasn't just about going in there as a trainer or a developer. It was about going in there as a business analyst, a partner, a trainer and colleague, and working really closely with the business to understand, intimately, what it is that they needed to do. Then, putting in place a solution that would work for them, support them and give them the skills that they need.'

The implementation of the new IT infrastructure is predicated on this approach:

'We haven't actually delivered any training at all; it was just about curating content, and pulling it together in a way that people could be signposted to the right stuff at the right time, and learn as much or as little as they need, based on their role.'

Interestingly, teams are finding that learners' perceptions are shifting too. While in the early days it was difficult to bring learners along with the use of learning technologies, this is now an expectation:

'When it came to CRM, instead of saying, "We need lots of classroom courses," what they actually asked for was lots of e-learning.'

Sue Rawson, IT Trainer

Developing new skills

The team have had great success with this approach, but there have been challenges along the way:

'The amount of change has been a challenge over the last few years, and the resourcing for that; and the rapid response that you need.' **Lisa**

What's helped throughout this time is the team's willingness to try new things and continually develop their own skills. This has ranged from attending formal training to learning on the job through each other, attending conferences and immersing themselves in new techniques and technologies.

The team have also recently introduced development days once a month, which are designed to boost creativity and innovation. Lisa is happy for the team to use this time in any way they choose *'as long as what you do brings a benefit back to the business and helps us do our jobs better'*. This might mean attending training or a webinar, conducting research or creating something new.

Sue explains why these days are an effective way of exploring new ideas and either adopting or discarding them:

'It's about trust. We know that if we go away, look at something, come back and say, "I've done a day on it, and it's not really going to work for us," then we can trust that.'

Ultimately this way of working links back to the core ethos of the team, and the belief that self-development is essential to the team's success:

'We never stop learning; we're always looking at how we can develop ourselves to have greater knowledge and understanding of what we need to do better in different ways, that will then support our staff.' **Lisa**

Getting the L&D operating model right

Alongside this continual self-development, getting the L&D operating model right across the organisation is critical, especially in relation to Barnardo's goal for a learning culture. Back in 2008, along with many other organisations in the recession, Barnardo's needed to increase efficiencies while still delivering effectively. The decision was made to move L&D management responsibility into local HR teams.

Reflecting on the current operating model and the goal to realise a learning culture, Katharine feels that central L&D adds greatest value and sustainable impact when it works in partnership with the strategy function, in order to truly meet the needs of the workforce in a timely way:

'It's almost a waste developing people just to do the job for today. You really want to develop their learning agility to create the capacity to grow the capabilities needed for the jobs for the future. The whole idea is to future-proof the organisation so that it is transforming the lives of the most vulnerable children and young adults in an even more significant way.'

Lisa feels because her team sits within the IT function and have experience in the business, they are seen as a business service, rather

than a traditional L&D function. This has been conducive to introducing new technologies to drive change.

Shifting learner perceptions

Outside of IT, many learners still tend to associate L&D with the use of more formal training programmes. Therefore one of the challenges in transitioning to a learning organisation will be shifting perceptions about what learning really is:

'One of the key initiatives that our learning and development function is going to need to design, deliver and embed is learning how to learn – everyday.' **Katharine**

Katharine feels that part of the solution to shifting learner perceptions is in recognising and leveraging the great L&D already happening within the organisation. She explains how many of the regional teams are driving forward their own development:

'The London region has action learning sets, makes good use of MOOCs [massive open online courses], and signs up to various online courses – taking ownership of their learning at a time that works for them to improve their front-line delivery.'

This shift in perspective will also involve approaching learning delivery differently. Katharine has aspirations to introduce 'leader-led development', which will involve 'our own leaders facilitating development on performance management or how to coach effectively. In effect, role-modelling effective leadership with our people face to face.'

Building future L&D capability

Alongside developing new skills, as Lisa's team have, there is also recognition that a variety of different capabilities will be needed to build a future-fit L&D capability:

'If I look at L&D people, there are those that are designers; those that are more process-orientated; there are those that are trainers; and there are definitely those that are more facilitative and challenging of the status quo to create the organisation we aspire to be. What a good L&D function looks like needs the traits and capabilities that cover all those areas.' **Katharine**

In this context, having breadth, alongside depth of L&D knowledge, is vital:

'It's not about doing one thing, standing in a classroom, doing e-learning or virtual classrooms – it's about being able to deliver what's needed by the business at the time when it's needed.' **Lisa**

Katharine agrees, and sees parallels between the attributes of effective L&D, and performance consulting:

'When it is at its best, it's hard-wired into the business. It's managing stakeholders; it's enabling transformational change; it's driving engagement; it's finding quick wins. In fact, it looks like the framework for a really good performance management consultant that delivers and up-skills its client to be better than before.'

Driving change

Katharine is clear on the challenges, the journey the organisation needs to go on and the role L&D will play:

'L&D is at its best when it's being the conscience of the organisation and thinking ahead about, "Actually, what are we going to need to do more of? What are we going to need to do less of?" ... We're going to have to up our game. We're going to have to look at ways to increase learning capacity and be more effective around when and how we deliver and integrate learning. We're going to have to do

lots of continuous improvement; be innovative; and make some tough decisions.' **Katharine**

While driving change at a corporate L&D level may be more challenging, Katharine recognises the value of finding 'pockets of excellence' in the business which can then be shared and showcased in a really collaborative way to instigate wider change and performance improvement. In this respect, having an established and forward-thinking IT L&D team is a substantial benefit to the achievement of the wider L&D vision.

Ultimately in driving change in L&D, as Sue sums up:

'You've got to have a team that's willing to do it, but you've also got to have a leader who is, to some extent, fearless.'



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