



Align Learn Do works with Verastar to reimagine its Learning & Development provision

Background

Verastar provides essential services including energy, telecoms, water and insurance to small businesses in the UK. A hugely successful business, Verastar employs 1000+ people, located in 14 offices across the UK, with 700 in the head office in Sale, Manchester.

In 2020, the private equity-backed business approached Align, Learn, Do to review its learning and development function and make recommendations that could help them build a world-class L&D offering.

The Challenge

Verastar had invested significantly into a learning management system (LMS) which was underutilised and not delivering the valuable content and useful reporting they had expected. The initial brief was for Align Learn Do to evaluate the system, make it easy for staff to use, support the team in curating useful and engaging content and show them how to generate reports that would be valuable for the Board and wider business units. In addition, with no specific Head of L&D and an HR department that was always busy running multiple concurrent projects, it was clear that Verastar would benefit from additional support in developing the L&D function and Align Learn Do was asked to provide recommendations.

The Solution

Stage 1 – Evaluation of the Learning Management System

Align Learn Do undertook a thorough review of the learning management system and worked closely with the LMS administrator, marketing and software teams to adapt the system by:

- Redesigning the interface to make it more user friendly
- Creating a series of badges to identify resources according to department and job role
- Setting up useful reports for the LMS administrator to use
- Creating an online learning experience and populating with LMS with content people would be drawn to

The majority of learning (80%+) was conducted in a classroom style, either face to face or via video call and Align Learn Do could see where significant efficiencies could be made. The team identified resources that would be suitable for digitisation and recommended a blended learning approach that incorporated facilitator-led, online and in-post learning.

Stage 2 – Evaluation of the Wider L&D Function

Using its successful framework approach, the Align Learn Do team conducted an in-depth discovery exercise with the senior leaders from the business. This generated a detailed report with recommendations with timelines and the brief for Stage 2 was developed and set in motion.

Recommendations:

1. Create a learning experience for employees, moving away from paper-based, classroom learning to a blended experience
2. Improve the way L&D is viewed across the business, from inductions only, to a full journey
3. Remove silos and drive efficiencies in L&D across the whole business

Stage 3 – Implementation

Align Learn Do transformed Verastar's L&D offering by:

1. Writing the principles of digital learning and how it would apply to different individuals and groups

Verastar had three emerging curriculums, of which the digital principles did not exist:

- Core – for all staff regardless of job title or function
- Common – for staff within the same business unit
- Specific – for defined roles within a business unit

Align Learn Do defined how digitised learning elements would be applied to each curriculum.

2. Evaluating LinkedIn Learning to Enable Blended learning

Align Learn Do trialled LinkedIn Learning with different cohorts including, management development, sales, operations & customer services, technology and a 'Free Use' group who could use it however they wanted. The cohorts consumed the resources of their choosing from a curated set, followed by face to face time with a Verastar Learning Specialist, and completed surveys of how effective and useful they had found the sessions. The trial was designed to see:

- How easy the platform was to use (80% reported over 3 months it was easy to use)
- Whether the content relevant to their roles (80% reported over 3 months it was suitable)
- How they would prefer to learn, Online only, Blended, Classroom Only.

The results:

- Online only – 64% agree
- Blended – 61% Agree
- Classroom Only – 20% agree

- There was a mandate for an online learning library to supplement the work of the inhouse digital learning team and to create targeted, blended solutions that could be aligned to business OKRs

The trial was a resounding success and the company agreed to invest significantly, buying LinkedIn Learning licenses for everyone with a 3 month+ tenure.

3. Redesigning Inductions

Inductions were lengthy and classroom-based. They were facilitator-led sessions in which people new to business would be expected to learn up to 14 different systems, 7 product sets and the communication skills needed to engage with customers without practising, for up to 5 weeks, before taking calls. A transformational redesign switched the inductions from 80% facilitator-led and 20% experiential learning to 80% experiential learning and 20% facilitator-led. Including theory, digital learning, classroom sessions, safe space practice, then out on the job, before coming back into the classroom to refine and embed. The learning specialist time saving is significant (60 Days for learning specialists to spend on the floor with existing staff rather than in induction) and new staff feel better prepared for the job, faster.

4. Creating Learning Experience Pathways for All Staff

The need was identified to create learning experience pathways for each role. Align Learn Do created a framework based on Living the Values, Achieving OKRs and Applying Learning in role that is being used across the business to create these pathways.

5. Redesigning the L&D Org

Align, Learn, Do identified the need for a Head of L&D and outlined three Centers of Excellence to operate underneath them:

- Digital Learning Services – This newly created team is responsible for the LMS, LinkedIn Learning, and the internal digital learning design team. Align, Learn, Do designed the new role Of Digital Learning Services Manager and, worked with selected 3rd party recruiters, found the right person
- Business Training – Renamed Career Services. The Team is now responsible for the inducting, onboarding and career development of people within the business. Helping people see how they can go from Graduate to CEO
- Talent – Renamed Talent Service. The Team is now responsible for the graduate scheme, apprenticeship scheme and People Management Development programme

6. Finding the right Head of L&D to Continue the Journey

Working with the Chief People Officer, Align Learn Do designed the role to find an individual that was both passionate about developing people and could articulate the commercial outcomes of learning experiences. Working with selected 3rd parties they found the right candidate.

The Outcome

Align, Learn, Do achieved a number of key objectives:

- Reimagined the L&D function, what it would look like, what it would deliver and how it would operate.
- Introduced agile design principles to enable the L&D team to respond to requests quickly and iteratively.
- Digitised resources where possible.
- Provided each learning specialist with 60 additional days every year to work the business floors where they could be more effective.
- Created job descriptions and recruited for L&D roles to allow Verastar to realise its vision
- Introduced video communications to replace some email communications, which has resulted in a much higher engagement rate.

Conclusion

Verastar now benefits from comprehensive online platforms, blended learning pathways and a fully digitised core curriculum that is accessible by all staff.

The new L&D team has been re-organised and the external talent to drive the vision has been found with no loss of roles within the existing team. The removal of siloes across the L&D function allows new business units to integrate seamlessly and the team to leverage each other skills to build world-class learning solutions.

Verastar is now properly equipped to achieve its vision of a world-class L&D function.