

"We've already got all the skills we need"

Stuart Crabb, Facebook's L&D guru, on why traditional learning methods just don't cut it in the heat of Silicon Valley

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Only a careful listener would detect the Californian twang in Stuart Crabb's otherwise impeccable English accent. But after five years ensconced in Facebook's world-famous campus, it's surprising he doesn't sound like a native.

As the social network's head of learning, British-born Crabb holds one of the highest-profile L&D roles going, tending to the needs of 6,000-plus employees worldwide and ensuring their learning experiences are as challenging as their work at the cutting edge of online technology.

Crabb has worked at Siemens, Yahoo! and Compaq, as well as a stint as a consultant for Marcus Buckingham, celebrated co-author of *First, Break All the Rules*. But today, he counts himself as a paid-up Silicon Valley citizen: "The Valley is fast, intensive, experimental and creative. It's full of the smartest people in the world. It's also highly multicultural. For an HR professional, it's like being in a candy store."

Ahead of the CIPD Learning & Development Show in London, *People Management* asked Crabb what he's learned about learning at Facebook.

How would you characterise the learning philosophy at Facebook?

It's important to understand our culture. Facebook is a curious and adaptive community of people that are trying to change the world. They're highly productive and hungry for opportunities to grow. Our culture is hierarchy-agnostic, which is one reason why becoming a manager at Facebook isn't a promotion. Generally speaking, our work in L&D has been very rooted in strengths-based thinking. We decided early on that we didn't want a slow and cumbersome competency framework.

What does that mean in practice?

We subscribe to the 70:20:10 model – 10 per cent of learning should be class-based, 20 per cent should come via the cohort (things like mentoring and coaching) and 70 per cent should be on the job. We believe the best opportunities for growth happen on the job. Although we have a curriculum of programmes, where I think we've been most successful is in bringing together a community of learners that can learn from each other.

In an organisation of our size, almost all the skills, knowledge and perspectives we need are here already, so our mission as an L&D function is to connect those who have something valuable to teach with those who are ready to learn.

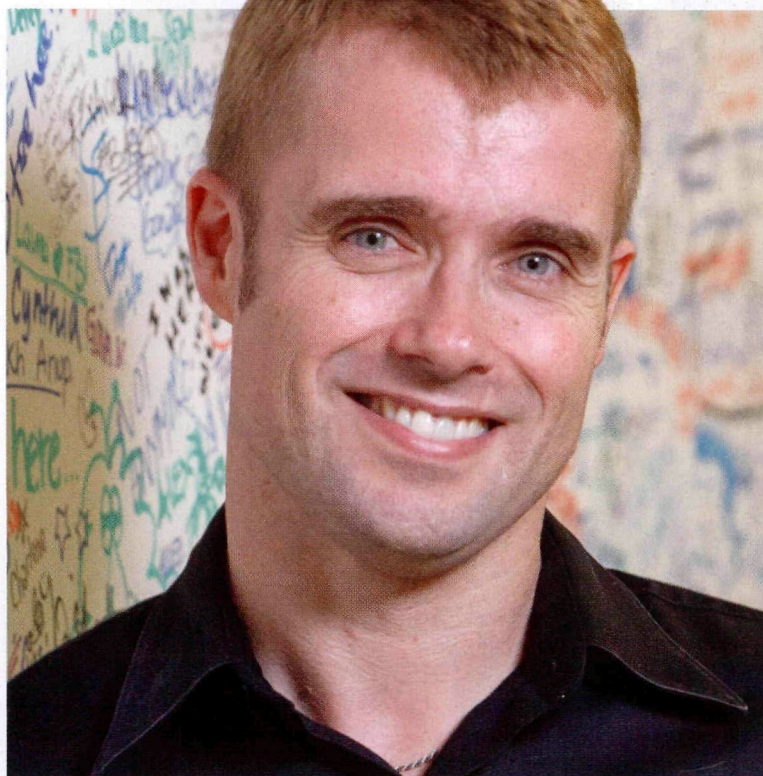
What sort of programmes work particularly well at Facebook?

There is no mandated training or learning at Facebook except for those things that are required by law. Everything is open, so anyone can participate in management and leadership training, for example.

We run peer-to-peer programmes, which provide opportunities for us to connect learners to teachers across a huge range of subjects, some very technical and job-specific but others covering everything from cappuccino art to organisational design. Providing those opportunities has been as important as our own courses.

Is that an expensive method?

The company has invested heavily in the learning and development function because we want to make



About

Stuart Crabb

Work and education

University of
Portsmouth,
University of
Westminster,
Siemens, Compaq,
HP, The Marcus
Buckingham
Company

Specialities

International HR
and learning

the experience of work at Facebook not only as engaging, inspiring and exciting as possible but also as frictionless as possible. Part of that is ensuring people see learning not as a requirement or a nice-to-have but as a fully integrated and fundamental part of what they do. It's almost like a muse to help them get better.

You've talked about having a 'data-driven culture'. How does that influence learning?

It means being sure that both the content of the classes and the overall approach are based on real insights. For example, we know managers are hugely important. If your manager sucks, everything else is secondary because for most people their experience of the culture comes through their manager. So we realised early on that we needed to understand how managers were performing.

The ground layer of manager effectiveness is development – the classes and interventions that help managers get better. The upper layer is how we as an organisation figure out – with all the information we have on performance – the patterns that show us what is going on with managers.

What do you do with all that info?

We have a people analytics team that works closely with me and my team to look at the data: the engagement survey, individual and team performance data and exit interviews. When you look at all that together, you get some clear pictures about who are the best-performing managers, as well as what conditions are likely to lead to the best performance. Does it matter if they've been a manager before they came to Facebook?

What length of tenure works best?

It helps us determine the right kind of strategies and conversations.

We turn the faucet of management development on or off, and develop different management interventions. And it helps us have very frank, crucial conversations with managers. **PM**

★ Jeff Turner, Facebook's head of L&D, EMEA will appear at the CIPD Learning and Development Show in London, April 30-1 May. For more details, visit cipd.co.uk/L&DShow

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