



getAbstract as a Key Enabler of Learning

Enabling executives to become the very best at what they do is a declared goal of General Electric's prestigious Leadership Center in Crotonville, New York. In this getAbstract case study, Peter Cavanaugh, operations manager for GE Global Learning and leader of Crotonville operations, explains why getAbstract is a key asset in GE's Global Learning portfolio and how GE has integrated getAbstract into its existing learning processes to expose managers to leading-edge thinking outside of GE, and to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing.



Leading-Edge Thinking

General Electric (GE) has a long history of innovation. Its changes and future orientation require its employees to keep constantly up-to-date with external thinking and to apply this outside knowledge to aspects of their everyday work. Consequently, learning plays a crucial role at the company.

By investing in learning, GE emphasizes the value it attributes to its employees' education and supports them "to become the best they can be in their particular function, to solve their customers' toughest problems and to learn about leadership."

GE drives learning, extending it to all its employees, and imparts its culture at every one of its locations worldwide. Its 300,000-employee workforce and global brick-and-mortar operations present special challenges that any learning offer needs to address.

Individualize the Learning Experience

Learning, GE has realized, must extend beyond classes. Adult learners need constant reinforcement of the subject matter. Therefore, invitations to classes should include content on the relevant topics to get the learners excited. After each class, book summaries and similar learning materials help keep the lesson

front and center in employees' minds and support implementation.

Sometimes, courses take up a lot of time, and while people might not have time to attend classes, they have time to read a summary or engage in conversation. Employees may need to solve a problem as it happens. GE's comprehensive learning offer therefore includes on-demand learning material to its employees through that process. Local learning managers can take advantage of teachable moments every day by providing this material to GE employees.

When GE decided to set up a central learning portal, it chose getAbstract

Achieved Results

- In the first six months GE has measured 3,000 new users of getAbstract's service
- and more than 50,000 summary downloads.
- Seeing the value of the getAbstract library, GE's top executives have become ambassadors of the service.

CASE STUDY: General Electric



because it fulfilled three main criteria GE had defined for its content. These “success factors” were:

1. “Content” – “The content needs to be valuable and understandable.”
2. “Context” – It must be possible “to relate it to a person’s overall job function or [his or her] learning.”
3. “Accessibility” – People shouldn’t have to go far to look for referenceware. “We want them to feel comfortable that the company provides them with the information they need to be successful leaders or successful individual contributors in the different areas.”

Great External Thinking

getAbstract solved a content challenge for GE, which sought to give its employees access to the “great external thinking...by really smart authors.” The concise and well-written summaries made the vast number of good books manageable. While managers can’t structure a conversation or a meeting around books, they can provide summaries on a particular topic and make that the basis of a discussion. Similarly, the number of topics covered in the getAbstract database facilitated contextualization. GE could easily map the content to its key initiatives. It created reading lists that covered specific topics or matched a particular group’s interest, thereby personalizing its employees’ getAbstract experience.

GE’s Global Workforce

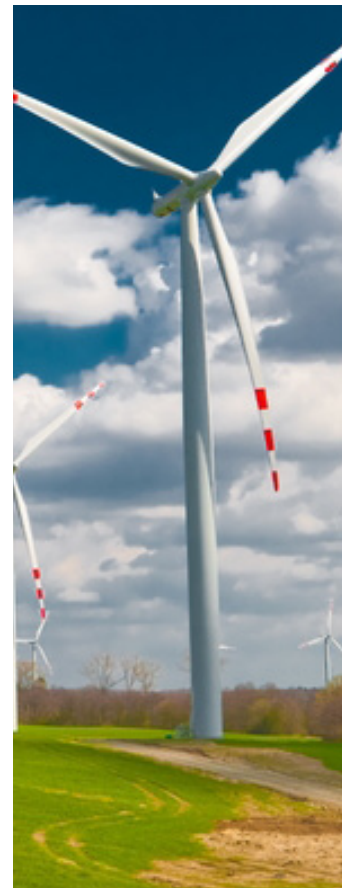
By providing different formats, getAbstract also

to find the summaries they require. Because getAbstract is available in multiple languages, GE can offer the service to more employees in their native tongue, making it resonate more with the employees across the world.

GE considers learning to be important and worth the investment. For that reason, it doesn’t require the learning experts at the John F. Welch Leadership Development Center in Crotonville to measure the return on investment. However, they look at other figures to gauge the success of their offerings. They noticed “an explosive desire for referenceware and job aids.” Employees take advantage of the on-demand learning material GE offers. Within a few months, more than 3,000 employees signed up for the getAbstract service and downloaded more than 50,000 book summaries. When people are exposed to an offering and return so they can download again or look up something else, they must find the content valuable, GE reasons: “Somebody who downloads more than one abstract is saying, ‘I see a value in what I’m getting.’”

Ambassadors of Learning

GE’s top executives have helped spread the word about getAbstract throughout the company. Their enthusiasm and involvement in integrating the summary service into key initiatives has accelerated the use of getAbstract internally. These executives have become “ambassadors” of the service because they have seen the value for themselves.



“GE has integrated getAbstract into existing learning processes to empower employees with on-demand external thinking that fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing.”

Peter Cavanaugh, Operations Manager for GE Global Learning

ticked the third box on GE’s criteria list: People could read summaries on devices including the iPhone or the iPad; they could even listen to audio summaries. At the same time, GE set getAbstract up in a way that enables employees to find the service easily. From inside GE’s firewall, a search term entered on the site will yield, among other results, the corresponding getAbstract summaries. That means GE’s employees don’t even need to access the getAbstract portal

For instance, one of the top executives attended an eight-person table discussion with a Harvard professor. None of the participants had been able to read the professor’s book, which he had sent out before the dinner. But the GE executive had downloaded and read several summaries of books by the author. As a result, he was able to engage in a dialogue with the professor and to benefit fully from the outside expertise.