

An Etihad Airways aircraft is shown in flight against a sunset sky with clouds. The aircraft is white with gold and blue accents, and the word 'ETIHAD' is visible on the fuselage.

Customer story

# Clarifying our development vision with Axonify

By **Andrew Stotter-Brooks**,

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If you see a street performer anywhere, you'll notice that they all follow a similar formula. Passers-by are attracted to the performer's entertaining feats, and only after the show is over does the performer ask for donations. Implementing a new process in a large organisation is a lot like being a street performer. Before you make an ask, you have to show the crowd what you can do. Once they're convinced that you're the real deal, they demonstrate their support.

I know this life well. It's true that I once was a street performer, but I have also developed expertise across the retail, leisure and hospitality industries over the course of my 25-year career in human resources. I've won my share of awards and created a positive track record of planning and improving organisational development and performance evaluations. For employers, that often means facilitating employee growth and optimising the learning and improvement processes. For employees, it means gaining the confidence and security to perform their jobs better.

I currently serve as Vice President of Learning and Development for **Etihad Airways**. Etihad is a large international airline based in Abu Dhabi, providing service to more than 400 destinations in 74 countries around the world. Founded in 2003, we have more than 100 aircraft with revenues upward of \$6 billion each year.

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At Etihad, I am responsible for the growth and development of our 24,500 team members. I do this work because I genuinely love developing people. Organisations can’t maximize their operations without first helping their employees reach their full potential. More than that, most people want to reach the heights possible given their natural ability and drive. They just need help getting there.

## **Plotting a different path**

My relationship with Etihad began as a consultancy nearly two years ago. From the beginning, Etihad wanted to improve performance by examining all forms of learning across the organisation. One of our biggest emerging problems was customer service and satisfaction. Our Net Promoter Score (NPS) was too low to establish the kind of success and growth we planned for our future. However, we lacked the proper internal development capabilities to significantly move the needle.


To create a new approach to learning, we also needed to restructure our development team. With so many locations around the world, our team members are spread out across dozens of countries. Although our international hub is Abu Dhabi, it was no longer practical to expect training to be handled in one location. We needed a way to facilitate a continuous approach to learning.

## **Understanding the challenges and developing a plan**

Etihad faced a number of specific challenges to organisational improvement. We had assembled a great pool of professionals, including excellent pilots, brilliant engineers and other hardworking, dedicated staff.



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However, as we promoted staff based on their job proficiency, we noticed that leadership and management skills didn't come automatically. Being able to fly a plane well does not equate to being good at managing pilots.

Since our organisation lacked a common focus and clarity of our employee development strategy, many of our leaders suffered from a kind of imposter syndrome. They were comfortable doing their jobs, but they needed help leading units. With so many staff working separately in different regions, it was very difficult to use training to develop a cohesive management culture.

Fortunately, Etihad's leadership recognised the dire need to develop a clear framework for staff improvement, and this recognition translated into a rather rapid deployment. We knew the state of our current human resources, and we understood where we wanted to go. What our staff needed was a simple model to demonstrate excellence.

To that end, we first created the Know/Do/Be process. The process focuses on three elements of our development plan:

- “Know” is what a team member must know at that career level
- “Do” is what they must put into practice to develop new skills and behaviours
- “Be” is the embodiment of the behaviours, values and knowledge and why it's important to the business

From there, we created eight knowledge areas that provide our employees with the information necessary to thrive in their roles. These knowledge areas were further broken down by level within the organisation. Accomplishing this also meant flattening the company to five career levels. By doing so, we effectively created universal knowledge points that apply to everyone in a certain job classification across the globe.



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Now we had to figure out a way to convey these universal knowledge points through an always-accessible training format. We developed an extensive training library and began using hosting services like Coursera. But with content being published every single day, we needed a more cohesive training format and central hosting location.

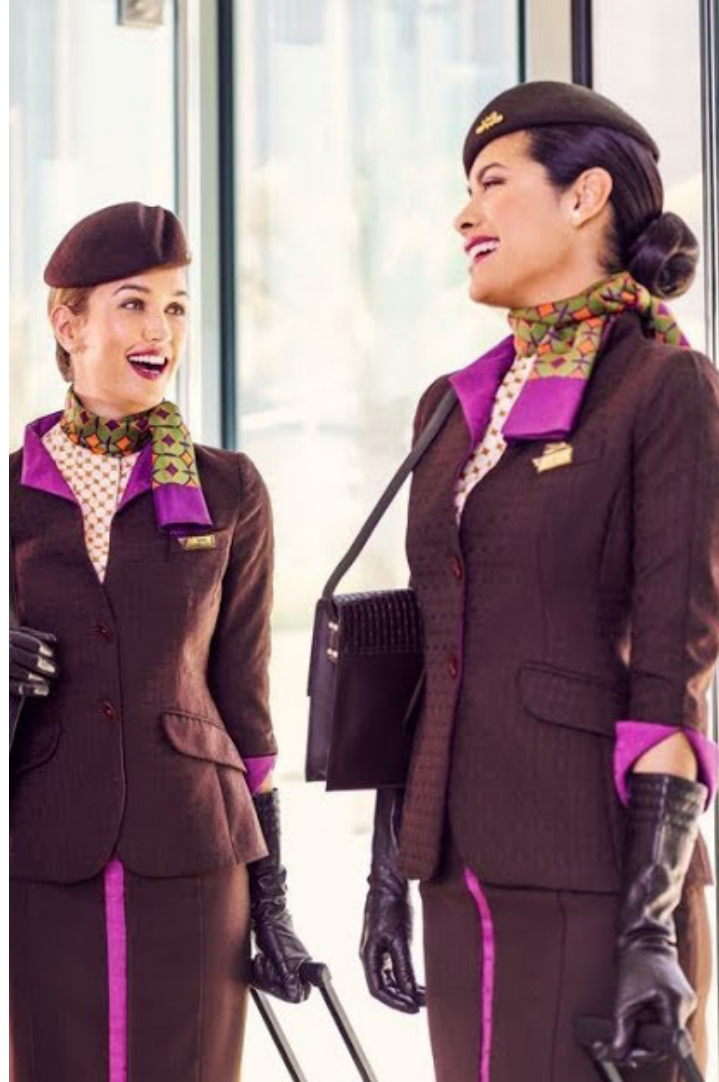
## Taking off with Axonify

While watching my daughter learn to cook a recipe using YouTube, I had an epiphany that changed the way we approach training. Our employees told us they enjoyed being coached and mentored, but they also wanted to learn at their own pace. The old approach to video training involved sitting people down at predetermined times for a series of hour-long sessions. After completing these sessions, they were deemed “trained.”

My daughter did not watch hour after hour of cooking videos. She would instead research a recipe, and then find a trusted chef to walk her through the recipe while cooking. Through her example, I realized the benefits of microlearning.

Instead of posting long videos to be studied in one sitting, we would create an ongoing series of much shorter material covering specific ideas, repeated over time.

The Axonify online training model is made for both microlearning and mobility. Unlike some other platforms, **Axonify** was designed to guide frontline employee training. They have specialized modules intended for onboarding, and tools designed to enhance communication and reinforcement of values and skills.



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These modules are also designed with a variety of end-user devices in mind, with an emphasis on mobility. As we are a global organisation, the technical resources and tendencies may change depending on location. Employees in one country may prefer learning via computer or laptop, while those in another country may lean heavily on smartphones for internet connections. We needed a platform that would work intuitively for every employee regardless of the device used.

Learning is more effective when it's fun, so we knew that presenting ongoing training to employees using the gamification elements built into Axonify would likely translate into a greater willingness to participate beyond any mandatory limits. People must want to learn in order to truly benefit from the teachings.

## Dazzling the crowd and securing buy-in

After recognising the potential for these features within Axonify, it was time to make like a street performer: stage my show and pass the hat. My first audience included Etihad's chief commercial officer. I told him upfront that I had a revolutionary training approach, and he offered to help pilot the program. We began with pushing training modules on selling techniques and sales skills to his teams. We eventually expanded to cover Mastering the Art of Service training to enhance our customer service skills.

Even though we're still very early in our rollout, we've already seen some benefits. Perhaps most concretely, our NPS numbers have skyrocketed from 25 to 55. In addition to customers being more satisfied, higher NPS scores can also lead to more customer referrals and greater revenues overall. We can't wait to see how these much higher scores impact our bottom lines.



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We've also begun to use Axonify for more than just hosting videos. Data is critical to everyone these days, and Axonify allows us to track group and individual data. That means we can directly monitor employee training performance and be more strategic about future development modules.

The performance is far from complete, but we began to share these wins with others in upper management. Nothing impresses quite like statistical improvements and concrete numbers measuring employee engagement. As skeptical as some leaders can be about training costs, they were willing to make a long-term investment once they saw the early results.

## Secure skills for an uncertain future

Despite the current climate for air travel, we've noticed a significant increase in employee engagement around training and development. In addition to our own training programs, we use some of Axonify's offerings as well. They have created some highly topical content, such as that on personal hygiene, which is relevant to all frontline employees.

At the end of the day, a business is only as good as its people. I am proud to say that through Axonify, we found a model that helps us to promote better employee growth. If I had to summarize Axonify in three concepts, they would be clarity, simplicity and making learning fun. Together, they will help us reach new heights.

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