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Close The Learning Loop

How to get more out of your learning technology to align L&D to business goals

What is a Learning Organization, Anyways?

Clearly defining learning in the realm of the enterprise (and pinpointing its business value) has proven elusive. Perhaps the symptom of a "too many cooks in the kitchen" scenario, academics, organizational theorists and business leaders have convoluted the meaning of the learning organization.
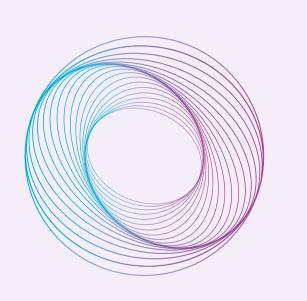
Some see organizational learning as a process that unfolds over time and link it to knowledge acquisition to amplify both individual and organizational performance. Some believe value is dependent solely on behavioral change, while others suggest "new" ways of thinking are enough. Is information processing as a learning mechanism enough to derive value or does the learning organization depend on knowledge sharing, rigid organizational routines, or even memory?
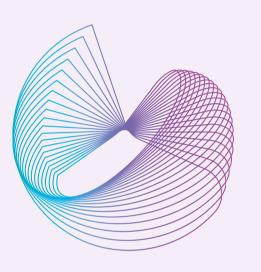
For argument's sake, and for the purpose of this paper, let's consider the learning organization as one that is skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge while modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.
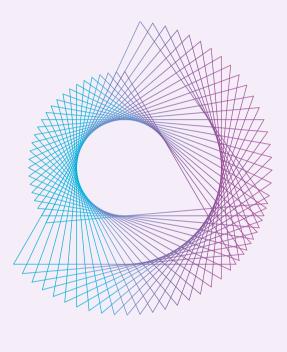
The 3 Stages of Organizational Learning

In a 1993 article for the Harvard Business Review, Professor David A. Garvin suggested that organizational learning is traced through three overlapping stages.

STAGE 1

Cognitive

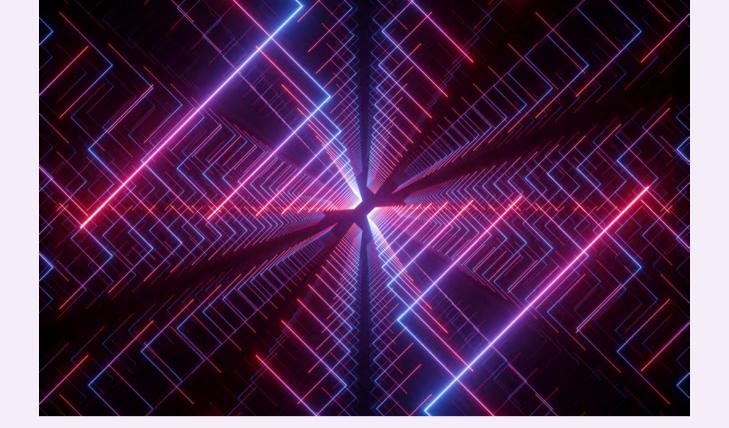Members of the organization are exposed to new ideas, build their knowledge on a given topic and start thinking differently.

STAGE 2

Behavioral

Employees start internalizing new insights and alter their behavior as a result.

STAGE 3

Performance Improvement

Changes in behavior start to produce measurable improvements, such as superior quality, better L&D delivery, increased market share, etc.

The 5 Traits That All Learning Organizations Share

While Garvin's research may be 25 years old, its foundations still apply. Only today, the mechanism that brings these overlapping steps together in today's digitally-driven environment is technology. It is the most important ingredient in this complex mix because it enables the learning organization to concentrate these inputs in a centralized environment and measures the results to continually provide value to both the learner and the organization.

Without learning, change never sticks; improvements are short-lived. Indeed, learning plays a crucial role in various business functions, such as developing new products or re-engineering processes, for example. An idea is just that until acted upon - only then can an idea trigger improvement. And while this is all very aspirational in nature, ideas aren't enough to establish a learning organization. Doing so requires the organization to look at the function of learning in a different light and recognize the processes and tools necessary to make it most effective.

By the end of this resource, we will define what a learning organization is, what it looks like and how ever-evolving technologies, including your learning platform and Artificial Intelligence (AI), will make that learning organization even stronger - and earn L&D a bigger seat at your company's decision-making table.

Learning organizations empower employees (and partners) to solve problems autonomously and benefit from the knowledge of their peers. Enabling employees to share ideas and insights freely, in a centralized learning ecosystem establishes a formal way to expand informal knowledge, and then work together to solve common problems/goals. While this approach produces measurable benefits to individual professional development, the organization is ultimately the key benefactor to this free-thinking, experiential approach.

Learning organizations foster lifelong learning and continual collaboration to fuel organizational success while elevating the value of enterprise learning and employee satisfaction with their roles. This has trickle-down benefits to foster deeper engagement with your organization's learning programs. Better yet, intelligent technologies such as AI can leverage that engagement to produce deeper and more personalized learning experiences, which contribute to ever-improving and consistent L&D outcomes the longer (and more) they're used.

According to Peter Senge, an American systems scientist and senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management in Cambridge, Mass., learning organizations share five identical traits:

1

Collaborative Learning Culture (Systems Thinking)

Successful learning organizations are supported by a collaborative learning culture, in which each person plays an important role in the overall framework. In the systems thinking principle, Senge suggests organizations are made up of smaller units. L&D leaders must understand the system as a whole, but also each component that's involved. For example: recognizing how compliance and company policy nurture a more efficient workplace. Meanwhile, collaborative cultures thrive on differing viewpoints, encouraging learners to respect and discuss the ideas of their peers.

2

"Lifelong Learning" Mindset (Personal Mastery)

Learning organizations require a forward-thinking mindset. Learners must embrace a lifelong learning perspective by valuing and understanding the importance of continual growth (i.e. continuous improvements to practical skills and knowledge, and applying them in real-life environments).

3

Room For Innovation (Mental Models)

Corporate learners must evaluate and assess existing intelligence via self-reflection to challenge beliefs standing in the way of progress. Doing so gives learners a way to understand how they fit into the "bigger picture" and how they can serve the "greater good". They must be encouraged to test new theories and approaches – Senge concludes that mental models should be acknowledged and challenged to go beyond unfavorable behaviors and assumptions.

4

Forward-Thinking Leadership (Shared Vision)

Empower forward-thinking leaders that are committed to the process, have a "shared vision," challenge assumptions, encourage self-reflection, and set an example for team members. Mistakes that build real-world experience should be encouraged, and then discussed to avoid repeating them in the future. Leverage your learning platform as a way to centralize this information by curating content via webinar recordings, blog submissions, short interview videos, etc., as a way to revisit solutions if similar problems arise again.

5

Knowledge Sharing (Team Learning)

Every member of each team must be aware of the company's learning objectives and desired outcomes, and work collectively to achieve goals. This function requires a centralized location in which user-generated learning content can be shared and consumed by various team members. Doing so enables each and every team member to benefit from the expertise of their closest peers and deepen their own comprehension as the function involves actively recalling information and then reinforcing it.

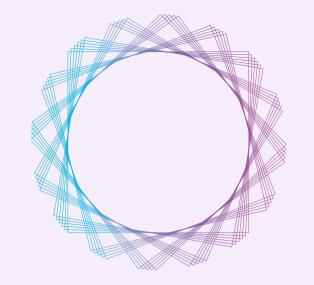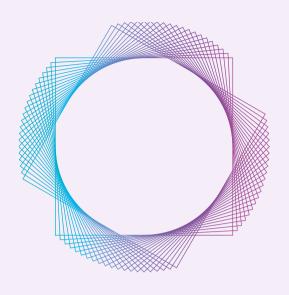# Creating The Optimal Learning Organization Structure in The Digital Age

According to L&D guru, Josh Bersin, only 10-15% of companies have well-developed learning programs properly aligned to strategy and desired business outcomes.

This fact alone represents a well-defined opening for learning leaders to influence the organizational structure, optimizing it in a way that amplifies the business value of the L&D function. The ultimate goal here is to improve alignment and executing on business priorities, while reducing the overall costs tied to L&D (indirectly, via connecting L&D to organizational wins).

Indeed, the ideal structure includes not just an outline of the organizational chart, but also the links between them and business strategy and goals, plus how to execute them. Doing so enables L&D organizations to deliver consistent outcomes while proving the value of the L&D function.

STEP 1

Start with an "ideal" in mind

Don't start any reorganization efforts without already having an ideal outcome for the L&D organization in mind. Strive to understand how a new structure can best deliver business value via stronger alignment. Understand where the learning function supports business strategies and goals.

STEP 2

Define strengths + opportunities and how to leverage them

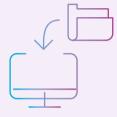Organizational structure isn't just about people, but also about understanding strengths and opportunities - and the best ways to leverage them.

STEP 3

Reorganization requires realignment

Learning leaders must consider the informal mechanisms that enable team and business partner relationships, including casual office conversations, social learning tools, friendships, prior reporting structures, etc.

These traits lend themselves well to developments in the learning technology arena, in which the tools necessary to make learning a part of the organizational culture have shifted from the management of learning to the facilitation of learning. Consider the illustration below:

LMS vs. Learning Platform: What's the difference

LMS

Focuses on the management of things (courses, learners, reports, etc.)
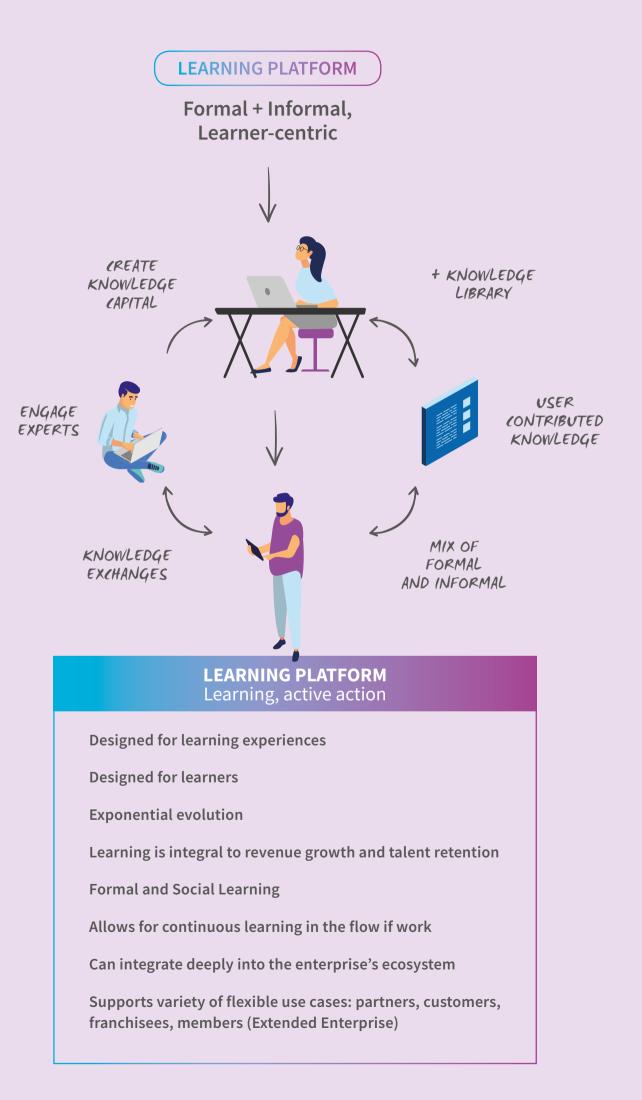
Learning Platform

Facilitates a holistic approach to enterprise learning, with an LMS at its core, to enable formal, social and experiential learning, as well as skills management, to link learning to overall organizational performance.

Traditional LMS vs Modern Learning Platform

LMS

Formal Learning: pushed top down

TAKE THAT COURSE!

PUSH FORMAL COURSES

ok

LMS
Training, passive action

- Designed for managing training
- Designed for LMS admins
- Slow evolution
- Training seen as a necessary cost
- Formal learning only
- Training requires time away from work responsibilities
- Hard to integrate with other Cloud solutions
- Only allows for rigid internal use cases

LEARNING PLATFORM

Formal + Informal, Learner-centric

CREATE KNOWLEDGE CAPITAL

+ KNOWLEDGE LIBRARY

ENGAGE EXPERTS

USER CONTRIBUTED KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES

MIX OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL

LEARNING PLATFORM
Learning, active action

- Designed for learning experiences
- Designed for learners
- Exponential evolution
- Learning is integral to revenue growth and talent retention
- Formal and Social Learning
- Allows for continuous learning in the flow if work
- Can integrate deeply into the enterprise's ecosystem
- Supports variety of flexible use cases: partners, customers, franchisees, members (Extended Enterprise)

Re-Architecting The Learning Organization to Drive Business Value

Traditionally speaking, there are four levels within learning organizations that must be aligned and optimized to connect links between L&D, business strategy, and the desired value.

Organizational strategy

Align L&D function to the business strategy and goals to address the needs of various stakeholder groups while having a vision, purpose, value proposition, learning business plan, annual budget, and quarterly priorities.

Organizational capabilities

High-performing L&D organizations optimize learning capabilities around strategic, financial, and operational excellence, plus defined capabilities: business alignment, organizational structure, process excellence, learning technologies, measurement and evaluation, finance and planning, and forecasting and demand management).

People competencies

L&D teams need internal champions with both general and specialized competencies, including business acumen, performance improvement, instructional design, project management, change enablement, learning technologies and training facilitation.
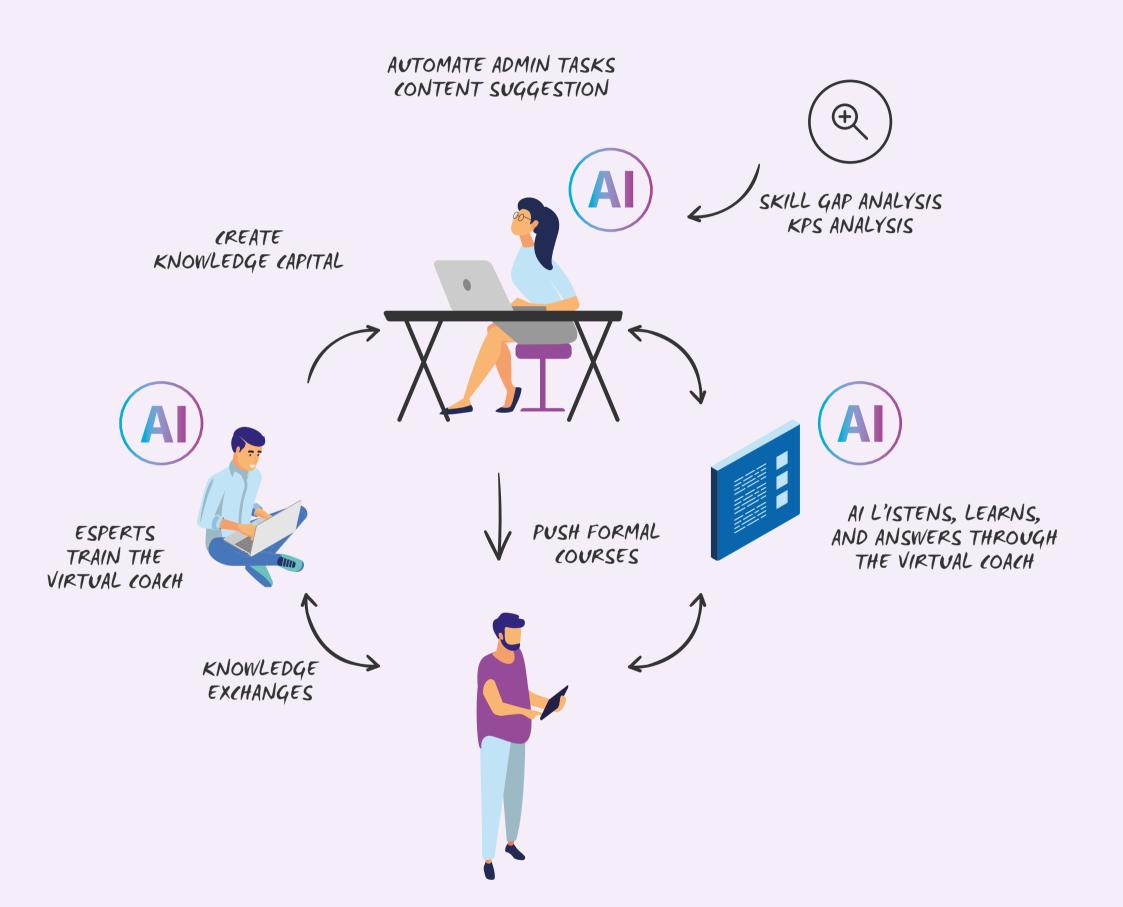
Execution methods

How the work gets done – methodologies must be clearly defined and optimized over time to produce consistent outcomes.

Methods include how an organization delivers quality assurance, social and informal learning, instructional design, program management, change management, technical development, and training delivery.

HOW AI CONNECTS L&D TO BUSINESS VALUE

AUTOMATE ADMIN TASKS
CONTENT SUGGESTION

SKILL GAP ANALYSIS
KPS ANALYSIS

CREATE
KNOWLEDGE CAPITAL

AI

AI

ESPERTS
TRAIN THE
VIRTUAL COACH

PUSH FORMAL
COURSES

AI L'ISTENS, LEARNS,
AND ANSWERS THROUGH
THE VIRTUAL COACH

KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGES

The rise of AI in L&D has come at an incredibly opportune time. As new generations of learners, who place an emphasis on opportunities to learn on the job, grow in numbers across global workforces, organizations must make learning a core cultural component to attract and retain quality talent. For learning organizations, these generational shifts, in addition to the growing need to place smarter technologies at the core of their operations, mean learning technology and AI will play a key role in connecting L&D to business value.

AI and machine learning (no, they aren't one in the same) will assist L&D leaders to better understand learner behaviors and provide the tools necessary to predict needs by recommending and positioning content based on past behavior (adaptive learning). Learning that is personalized to the individual is a powerful way to engage today's workforce – making sense of the data derived from these machines will enable L&D to uncover new ways to drive business value with learning.

For these solutions to take hold, however, there must be a recognition that technologies, such as AI, are not a replacement for humans. Instead of shying away from the digital evolution, it must be embraced as an opportunity to enhance the L&D administrator experience – it allows them to focus attention and energy on rewarding and challenging tasks, such as creative and strategic solutions.

Investing in new technology is no longer an option, it's a necessity – especially when it comes to improving the way people work and learn. Let technology do the repetitive, menial tasks, and learn to leverage the data-driven insights AI provides to make the learner experience more effective and more personalized. Doing so produces greater learning outcomes, better aligns L&D to organizational performance and amplifies L&D's value to the business.

Apart from the quality of learning, AI also presents an extremely valuable solution for L&D in businesses with high rates of dynamism. For example, organizations that require content to be continually updated will benefit from the adaptive learning environments AI produces by accurately predicting how that material needs to improve and change by processing more data over time (satisfying Senge's five learning organization traits). These adaptive capabilities will also enable the creation of complete learning personalization, in which the AI engine gathers individual learner data and refines it based on their behavior – over time.

AI will touch each of the four levels of the learning organization structure and act as the catalyst a supposed 85% of businesses require to properly align learning programs to strategy and desired business outcomes.

Make Learning Your Competitive Advantage

Join 1,500 global organizations who are using Docebo and artificial intelligence
to change the way their people learn, produce better learning outcomes and generate measurable business value.

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