

How to *Win* at

Learning Measurement



2021



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Current Situation

One of the biggest learning challenges companies face is the inability to measure its impact on people and the business. This means that for all the time, money and energy spent on learning, many organizations have no idea what they are getting in return. Brandon Hall Group research found that nearly two-thirds of companies consider this inability to measure a serious challenge to learning’s overall effectiveness. This is an important distinction. It is not just the inability to demonstrate impact that is the issue. It is that this inability leads learning to be less effective.

How does each of the following negatively affect your learning organization’s effectiveness?

Inability to measure learning’s impact on business performance



● 1 (Not at all) ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 (Completely)

Inability to measure learning’s impact on individual performance



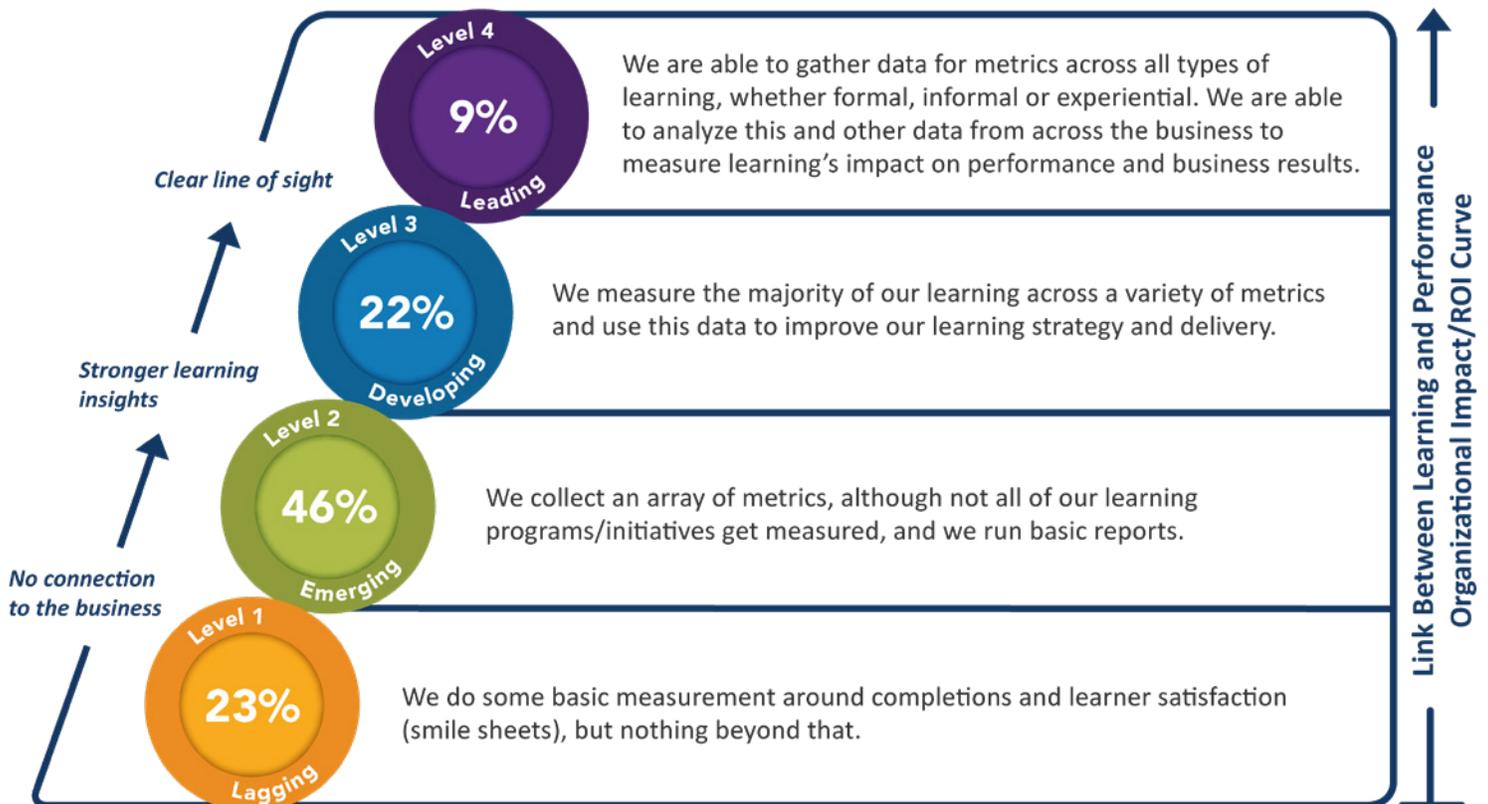
Source: Brandon Hall Group, State of Learning Practices, 2021

As a result, **improving analytics** is number two on the list of top learning priorities companies believe will help achieve business outcomes.

Without proper measurement, it is impossible to see determine if the learning is working or not. This, in turn, makes the prospect of deciding which programs to change, invest in or eliminate a guessing game. Few companies have a mature enough measurement approach that provides real insight into learning's impact.



Measurement Maturity Model



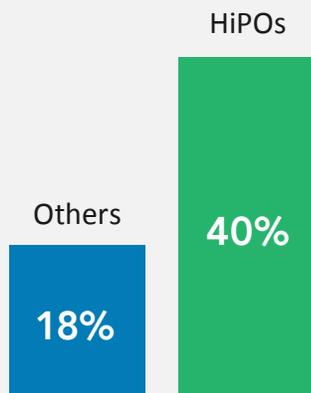
Source: Brandon Hall Group 2021

Merely 27% of companies have a learning strategy that includes a framework to measure success, according to Brandon Hall Group *2020 Learning Strategy Study*. This means that nearly three-quarters of companies are flying blind when it comes to learning. However, high-performing organizations (HiPOs) are more than twice as likely as others to have such a framework. HiPOs are companies where key business performance indicators such as revenue, customer satisfaction and market share are strong year-over-year.

The biggest obstacle that gets in the way of good measurement is that most companies don't start there. Measurement is seen as an endpoint or a wrap-up for the learning process. In fact, measurement starts at the

beginning — setting the proper metrics and how to measure them before the program is even developed. Very few companies say that most or all of their programs start here although HiPOs are much more likely to do this.

Does Your Learning Strategy Include a Framework to Measure Success?



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Strategy, 2021



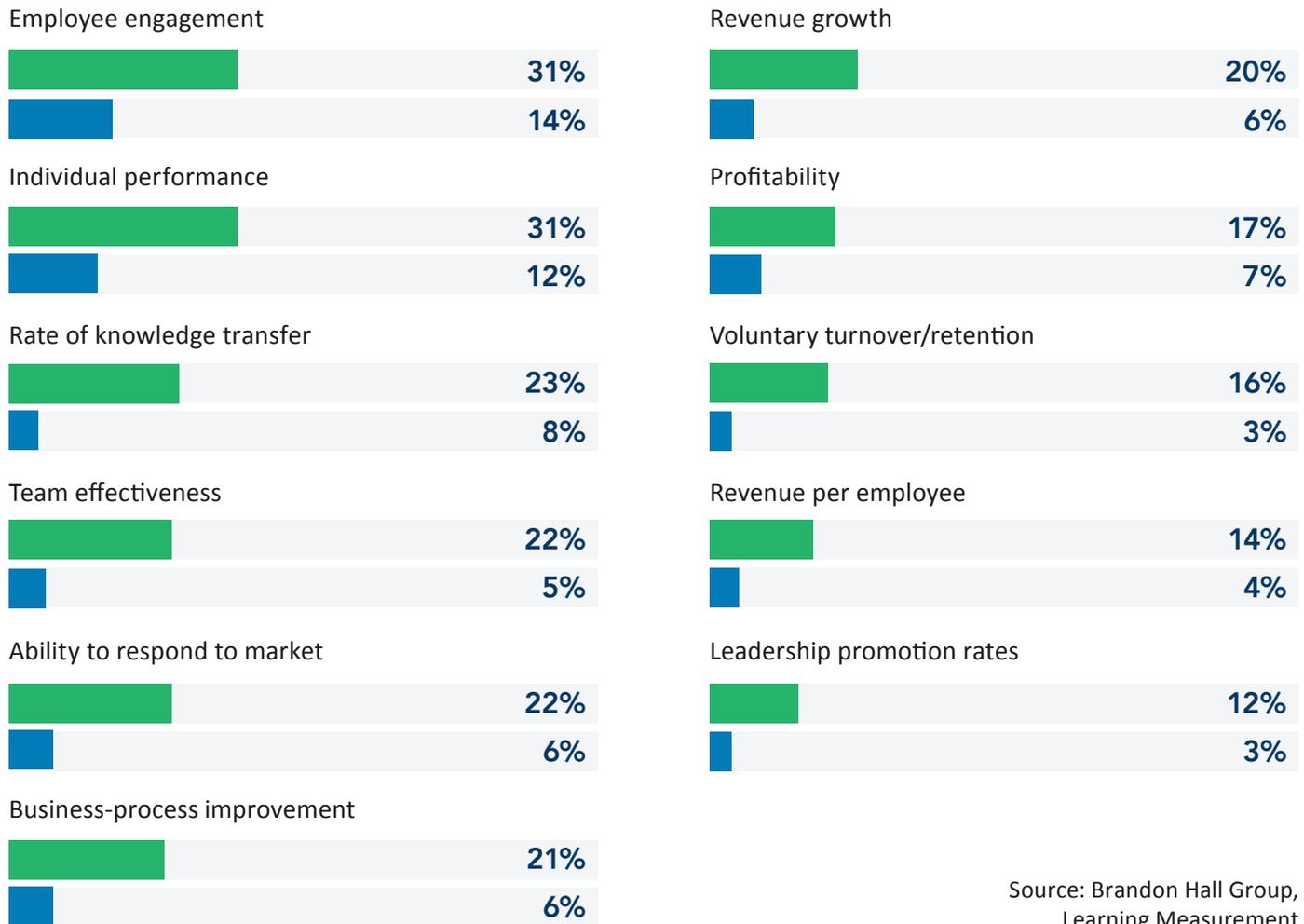
Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Measurement

Additionally, high-performing organizations are much more likely to measure learning's effectiveness against broader, more strategic outcomes than their lower-performing counterparts. And while few

companies are consistently using metrics such as employee engagement, individual performance and team effectiveness, HiPOs are more than twice as likely to do so.

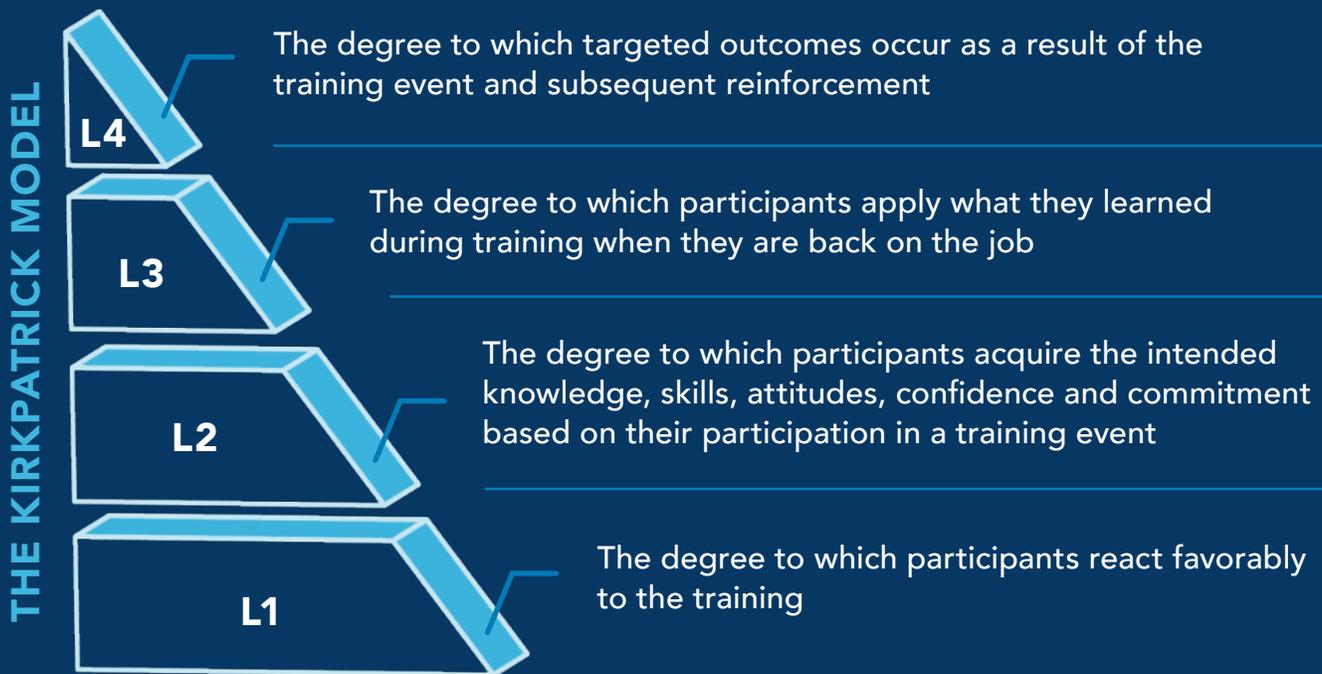
Outcomes Measured Consistently

● HiPOs ● Others



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Measurement

In essence, we must measure not just to prove that learning is having an impact, but to improve that impact. While these ideas are related, they need a different perspective, different timing and different kind of information. One of the best ways to do this is perhaps one of the oldest, as well. The Kirkpatrick Model of Learning Measurement has been around for nearly 70 years, adapting and evolving with the times. It has its limits but is a great pedagogical tool that is easy to explain in five minutes to a non-learning professional.



This model is well-suited to help organizations think through measurement at the beginning of the process, rather than just a tool to be used at the end. It can help to define what success will look like and move backward, building a chain of evidence through the four levels. If a stakeholder comes to the L&D team with a request indicating the business outcomes they expect, the model can frame the discussion. The stakeholders talk about what kind of behaviors must change or be improved, as

well as the kind of skills and knowledge that must be gained by the people who will be upskilled.

This can form a type of business contract between L&D and the stakeholders, which can then be supported by the measurements. By gathering the right data, L&D can prove the impact of learning initiatives on the learners' jobs (Level 3) and the organization (Level 4). To do so, L&D has to determine if they can see the new behaviors on a regular, consistent basis.

Can they observe the trends and the business outcomes expected by the stakeholders?

Of course, this is all to prove learning's impact. But what of improving learning? That is where Levels 1 and 2 of the model become critical. They complete the chain of evidence and allow the company to understand what worked, if it was a success and why. It can bring any issues to light with a role or specific population and identify where the chain broke.

The research shows that the biggest reason companies aren't measuring behavior change and business impact (Kirkpatrick Levels 3 and 4) is because they do not have the metrics to do so. Only a small minority say they do not need to measure at these levels, while the vast majority must figure out how to overcome their measurement challenges.

Why Aren't Companies Measuring at Levels 3 and 4?

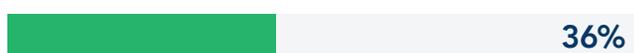
We don't have the proper metrics.



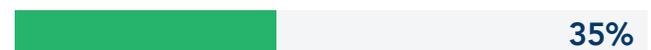
We don't have the time/staff.



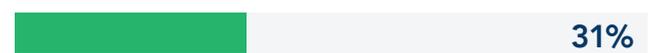
We don't have the technology to support.



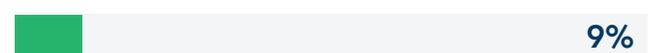
It is too difficult to link learning to outcomes.



It is too difficult to assess.



We don't see a need.

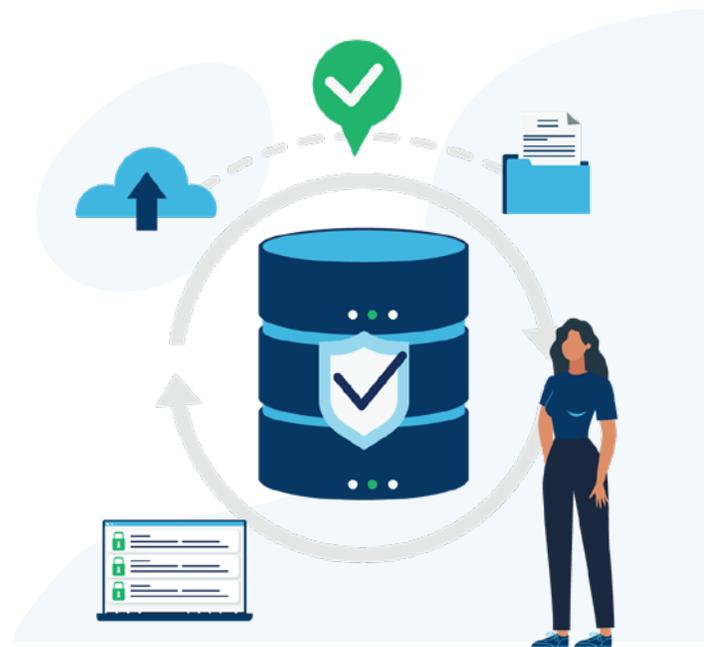


Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Measurement

Time and resources are always issues as well.

Learning professionals are usually overwhelmed by their next project to roll out or the next upskilling program to define and design.

There never seems to be time to stop and measure the success of a program, which is why so many companies rely solely on completion rates and smile sheets.



Strategies for Winning at Measurement

We can look at these measurement challenges in the context of three different job roles: an accountant, a consultant and an L&D manager. Each role involves considerable analysis, but how much of that effort should be spent analyzing what happened in the past versus what should happen in the future?

Brain Time Available for 3 Types of Professionals



For an accountant, the job is mostly to understand the past, analyze accumulated data to build reports and verify an organization's financial results on a yearly, monthly or quarterly basis. A consultant is half and half in a way, analyzing data to better understand the past to make recommendations for the future. For the L&D

manager, the analytical brain space needs to be 90% forward-looking. Learning professionals always must have the next program in mind and the company's future upskilling and reskilling needs.

Measuring the impact, of course, involves looking backward to some degree,

but learning leaders should be ambitious. At the same time, the measurement strategy has to be pragmatic enough to fit into the reality that most of the weekly agenda will be dedicated to other activities. Measurement strategies that are too ambitious often fail because they simply do not fit this reality.

There are several strategies for taking an ambitious yet pragmatic approach to learning measurement.



Align with the business. Set expectations with the sponsors before the program's design and ensure they are aligned with business objectives.



Have an 80/20 approach. Spend 80% of your time on the most critical 20% of your programs to achieve the highest impact.

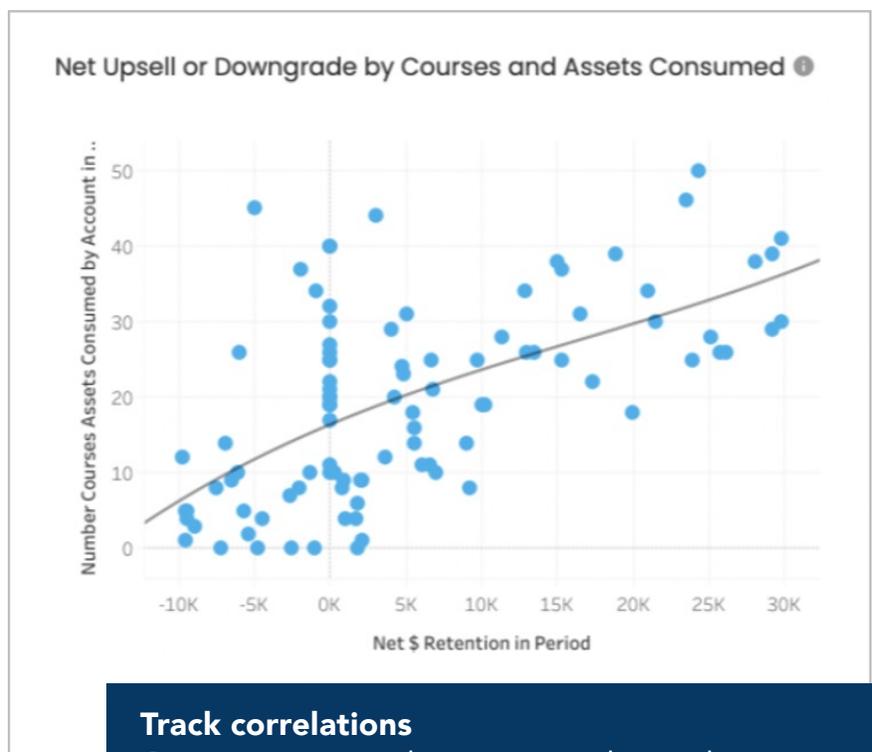


Focus on leading indicators. Focus on pilot session metrics and leading indicators to save time and resources before program rollout.



Ensure accountability. Ensure you identify responsibilities for Learning performance improvement and turn your evaluation results into action plans.

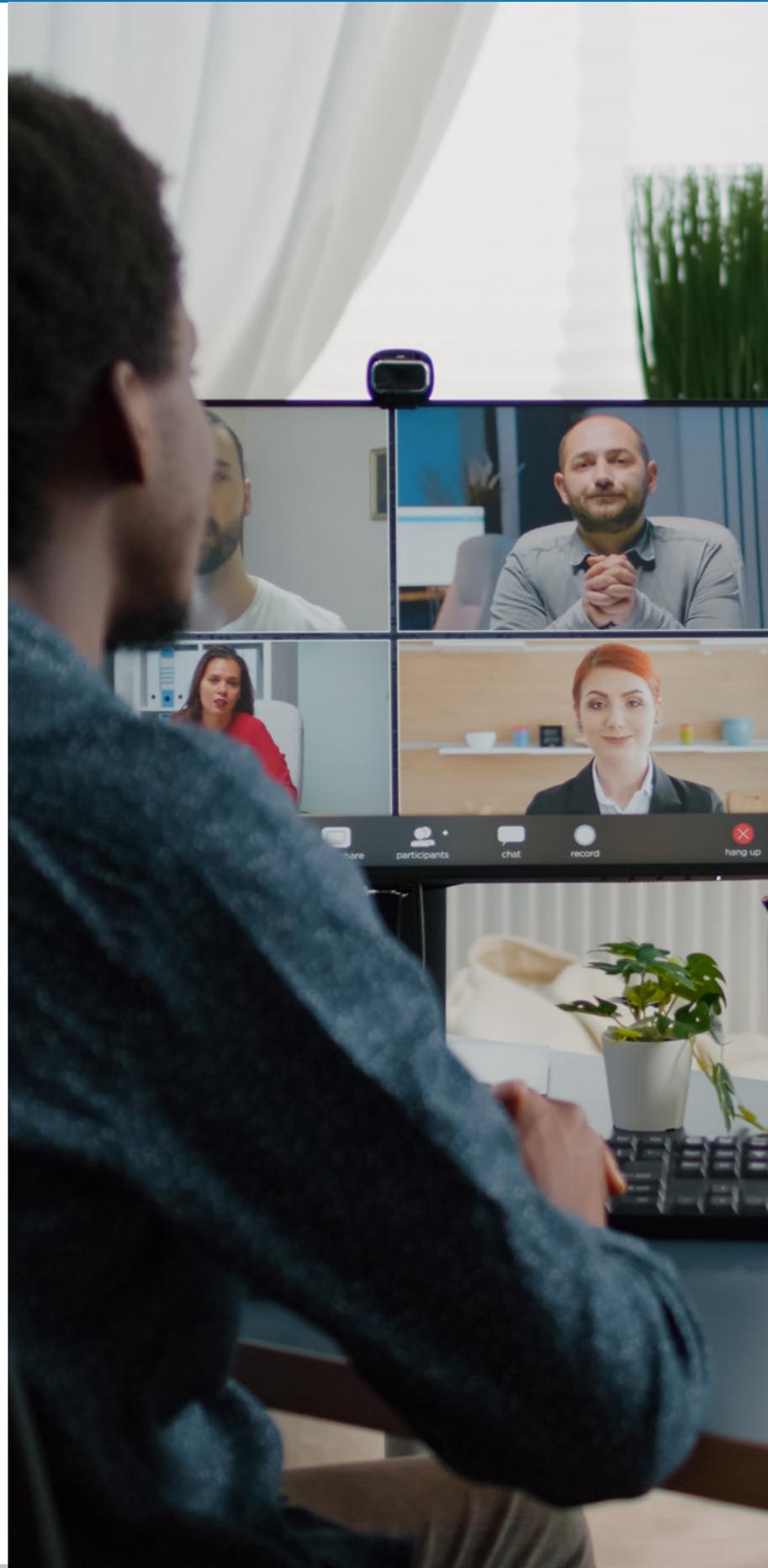
To guarantee Learning is aligned with the business, it is critical to recognize that the end is the beginning. In other words, the program must start with clear, identified, measurable outcomes. This requires an agreement or contract with the business partners on what the ultimate goal is for this program. What is it that they need people to be doing differently, better or faster? Then, as a learning professional, can you identify the right ways to achieve those outcomes? And ultimately, will we be able to track correlations between learning activities and business outcomes?



Source: Data Source, Salesforce

Because time and resources are so precious, it is critical to prioritize your learning measurement efforts. A deep understanding of the business' priorities will help define Learning's priorities and identify the top 20% of your programs next year and where you must be more ambitious in terms of learning measurement. These should reflect areas where the business sees its greatest upskilling challenges.

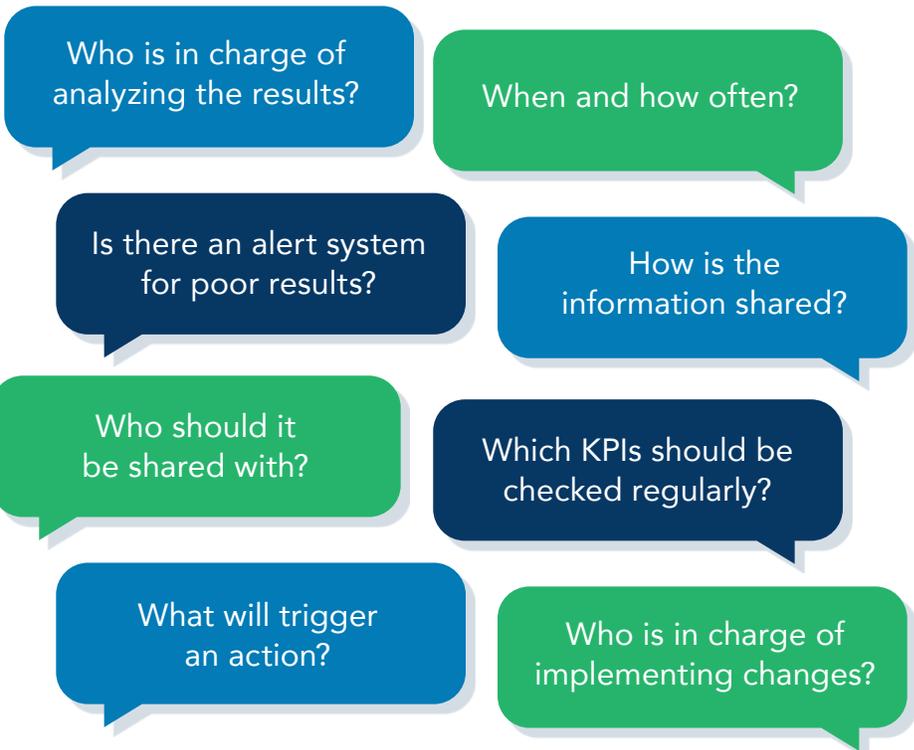
Traditionally, Learning relied on lagging indicators as a measure of its effectiveness. These are the metrics that come much later, long after the training is complete. And while they are ultimately a strong and comprehensive measurement of how well Learning is performing, it is critical to measure well before that. Focusing on leading indicators makes learning more agile and able to quickly course-correct, as needed. If you only wait for lagging indicators, the program could be completely off the rails by then. Fortunately, there are many leading indicators available.



Leading Indicators

Learning surveys	LMS data	Other data sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated impact • Intention to apply • Post-course action plan • Improved awareness • Performance improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion rate • Access and sharing rates of specific content • Assessment scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects launched • Number of meetings on the topic • Number of specific tasks registered on a CRM tool • Client satisfaction • Manager actions

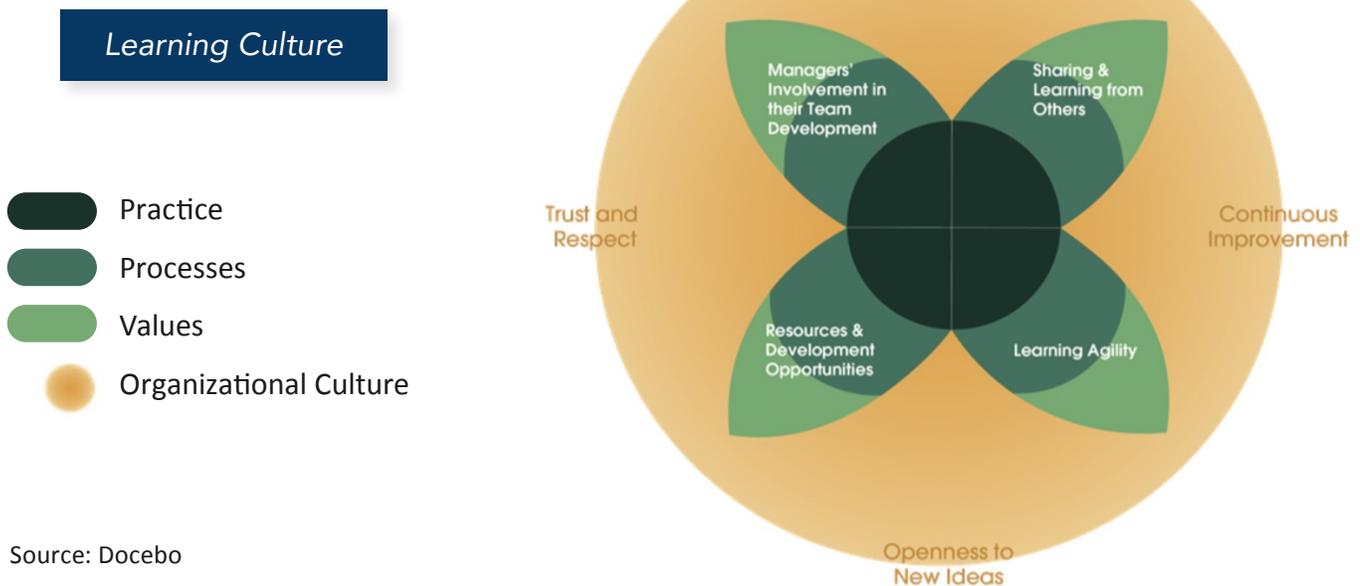
And finally, accountability is critical for everything to work. Having an ambitious learning measurement strategy is important, but as already stated, it is hard because learning professionals have so many other daily tasks. But if you to ensure that no matter what is evaluated, the result is better learning and better results, there are some key considerations:



Measurement as Part of the Learning Culture

It is important to look at measurement as a piece of not only the larger learning ecosystem but the entire work environment as a whole. This helps provide context. The truth is, sometimes the training works, while the same training in other situations may not. Learning does not exist in isolation. A strong learning culture model considers this and includes elements such as managers’ involvement in that team, the activities around sharing and learning from others, learning agility — especially a learner’s individual ability to be the main driver of their own development — as well as the resources and development opportunities that are available to learners daily.

Measure the Conditions of Learning



It is critical for learning professionals to keep all of this in mind. They lead to the success, quality and impact of the programs they create and could assess the conditions of learning and explain why the same course works in some cases but not others. They should also be able to measure whether formal learning is required or if learners are learning sufficiently through more informal means. This is becoming increasingly important as more organizations look to informal learning as a way to accelerate upskilling.

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