



CREATING THE EFFECTIVE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

WHAT'S YOUR LEARNING IQ?

What is an Effective Learning Organization?

Effective Learning Organizations are run as a business and are fully integrated into the business strategy and metrics of the larger organization. In an Effective Learning Organization, learning goals and business goals are essentially the same, business metrics are specific, and success is measured on driving those metrics.



How do you create an Effective Learning Organization?

Effective Learning Organizations use the tools and processes of business to create workflows that are timely, efficient, cost-effective, and demonstrate a clear impact on the enterprise. Effective Learning Organizations:

- Are fully aligned with the business goals of the enterprise
- Speak the language of business, not just the language of learning
- Are able to define the return on investment (ROI) of their efforts—when the business can see the impact of their learning investment, they are more likely to continue investing in learning
- Are scalable, creating improved cost scenarios and more rapid delivery cycles
- Utilize supply chain methodologies, so that costs are controlled while appropriate resources are available for critical and high-demand initiatives

So what are the tools necessary to build and sustain an Effective Learning Organization? How do you identify the gaps in your organization that need to be closed? Effective Learning Organizations need to be structured to perform optimally, by having the Strategy, People, and Process that supports their path to success. These attributes make up an organization's Learning IQ, the set of attributes that drives learning effectiveness.



1. **STRATEGY**

Effective Learning Organizations leverage the following elements of Strategy:

Business Strategy

Effective Learning Organizations don't just support the business process—they are fully integrated into the business strategy. With human performance, a critical component of virtually all businesses, guaranteeing that people have the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to be productive isn't a support function, it's vital to the achievement of business strategy. In an Effective Learning Organizations, the learning organization:

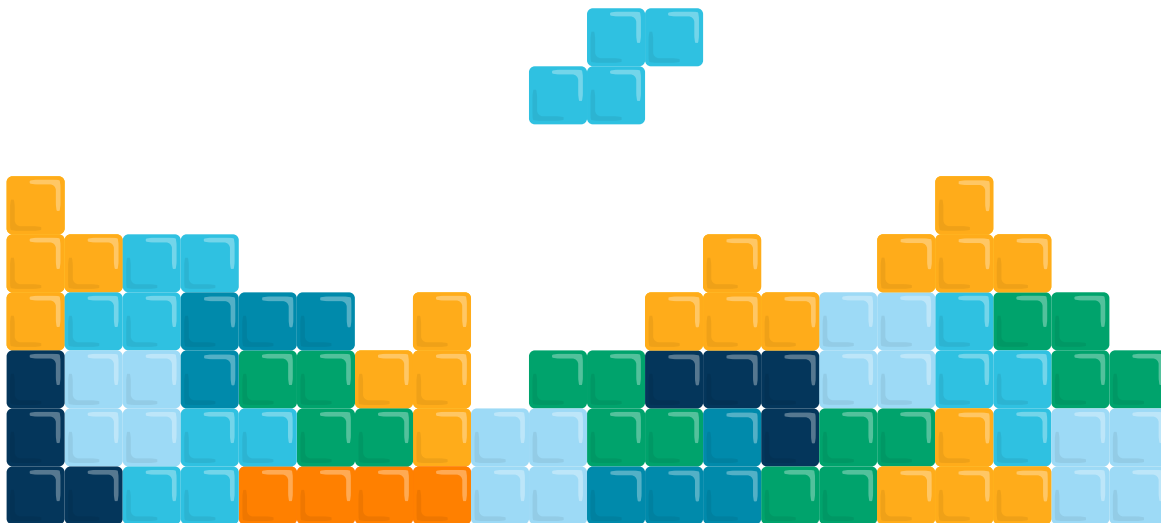
- Can demonstrate how their activities drive performance and the achievement of business goals
- Is integrated into the business planning process and has a clear role in driving the success of initiatives
- Communicates value in the language of the business, not the language of learning



Organization Design

What is the right way to structure a learning organization? Should it be highly centralized, to allow for resource sharing and economies of scale? Highly decentralized, so the output is specific to the unique needs of different functions? Should it be a hybrid, incorporating the best of both worlds? Is there even a “right” way?

Organizational dynamics (culture, mission, vision, communication style, etc.) play a huge role in creating an effective organization design. For example, creating centralized learning in a highly decentralized organization will require robust change management.



Ultimately, effectiveness may have less to do with structure, and more to do with standard processes, delivery mechanisms, and governance. In any structure, however, the key to building efficiency and scalability is often a Shared Services model. Even if you opt for a decentralized structure, do you need multiple LMSs? Multiple video production facilities? Can you share scheduling resources and facilities? Not only does a Shared Services model build efficiency, it builds quality as well, as your Shared Services become centers of excellence with proven and repeatable processes.

Governance determines what initiatives enter the production chain of a Learning Organization, and how those initiatives are funded. A flawed governance process will impact everything else a learning organization does. Effective Learning Organizations have an interactive governance process, and methods for establishing the cost, value, and ROI of each initiative.

Learning Excellence

The "training department" used to be about creating classes. Today's learning organization is about providing a continuous stream of learning opportunities, from the moment an employee is hired, and throughout their entire career. An Effective Learning Organization creates learning that is:

Aligned, so it drives behaviors that are valuable to the business

Meaningful, providing context so the learner understands why it is relevant to their job and their career

Appropriate, so the learning modality matches the content

Accessible, so it is easy for the learner to get to, no matter where in the world they are

Multi-Modal, providing different ways of learning and the opportunity to dig deeper

Learner-Centric, so it's focused on what the learner needs to do, not what we want to tell them

Ongoing, so learning is pulled through into the job and consistently reinforced

There are a great many learning technologies available to us, but technology is a tool, not a solution. The wrong content delivered through great technology still adds little value.

In many Learning Organizations, content is the primary asset. Unfortunately, in too many organizations, content is uncatalogued, difficult to access, or structured in ways that make it difficult to reuse, update, or repurpose. Effective Learning Organizations have strategies in the following areas:

“Perishable” Content: Content that is likely to change in the future is structured for change, and use delivery platforms that are flexible.

Content Accessibility: Organizations often build the same course multiple times, simply because nobody is aware of existing content, or can't locate it. Effective Learning Organizations have strategies and tools for storing, indexing, and retrieving content for reuse or repurposing.

Rapidly Changing Content: In many industries, important content (such as product information and regulatory requirements) change so rapidly, it can be difficult to release learning content before the content changes again. Effective Learning Organizations are integrated into the business so they can create learning and performance support at the same time as the changes are being conceived, and have strategies for quick turnaround.



2.

PEOPLE

At the end of the day, Learning Organizations are made up of people; qualified, skilled, energetic, and focused individuals who help the organization realize its vision. Effective Learning Organizations get the most value from their people using the following strategies:

Capabilities

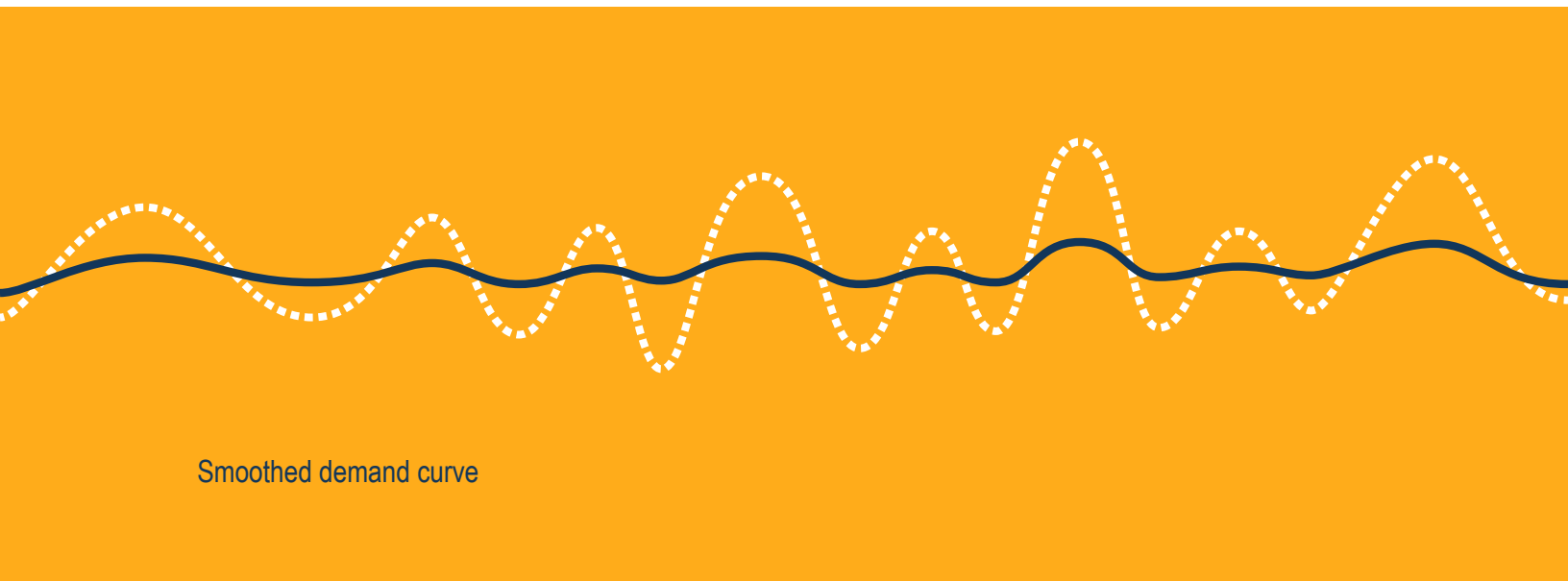
Effective Learning Organizations constantly grow and upskill their teams. Good tools will never replace good people, but good tools make good people even more effective. Effective Learning Organizations have:

- Assessment processes for identifying the right people for the team
- Onboarding strategies, to guarantee that team members understand the organization and their roles within it
- Incentives and rewards to guarantee that people focus on the right things
- Strong opportunities for development to allow their best people to grow within the organization



Demand Planning

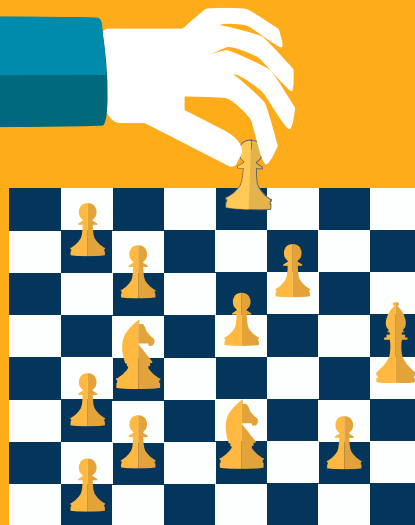
The demand curve for a Learning Organization often looks like a roller coaster with periods of high demand for learning resources followed by periods where demand flattens out or even dips. This curve can make resourcing difficult. So how do you begin to tame the learning demand curve? Learning Demand Planning determines what type of resources will be required throughout the year, and when. Once an Effective Learning Organization understands their demand trends, they can distribute their high-demand periods throughout the year, flattening the demand curve and requiring fewer resources to get the same amount of work done. The demand curve will never be flat; it will always have peaks and valleys. However, the smoother you can make your demand curve, the more efficiency you can build into the process.



Resource Strategy

Like any part of a business, the Learning Organization utilizes and consumes resources, which represent both a cost and a benefit to the business. An Effective Learning Organization has a clear strategy to optimize resources, including:

- A well-planned and well-managed Supply Chain Model, establishing a predictable demand curve through the course of year, allowing for smart and efficient resource planning. Demand Planning helps to guarantee that key resources will be available during peak demand periods (such as new product introductions, new strategic initiatives, global meetings, and regulatory cycles), while minimizing the need to carry underutilized resources during periods of lower demand.
- Demand and Resource Balancing is half of the Demand Management equation. The other half is having ready access to resources when you need them. While you can staff to the highest point on your demand curve, that usually means you will have underutilized resources at many points during the year. Instead, Effective Learning Organizations staff to the sustainable level of demand, the level that will be consistently "full" throughout the year. The spikes above that level are handled with Flexible Resources, via contractors, partners, and other temporary (but still highly qualified) team members.



Cross-Training is a good resourcing strategy for short-term needs. Having a broader skill set on your "permanent" team means you can handle more challenges. However, longer-term demand spikes will likely require partners or flexible resources.



3.

PROCESS

Long-term business success is driven by scalability. A process that is used once and never again is not scalable; a process that can be used time and time again in a variety of scenarios is scalable, and provides more value each time it is used. In many organizations, tools and processes are evolutionary, rather than strategic. They may not be efficient, may not adhere to best practices, and may even be outdated and ineffective.

Effective Learning Organizations evaluate business goals and develop effective methodologies that can be used over and over again to meet the needs of the organization. Learning assets are designed for reuse and repurposing, and in appropriately small packages so they can be used in many different solutions. And since business needs change rapidly, processes tools and assets are built to allow for future changes, and are evaluated on a regular basis for effectiveness.

Project Management

Project management is a key business discipline, and Effective Learning Organizations have a project management function that coordinates learning projects across the business.

Vendor Management

Most learning organizations use vendor partners to achieve some of their goals; in many organizations, those partners are critical to success. Effective Learning Organizations consolidate work into a small number of best-in-class vendors. They build long-term relationships and integrate partners into the organization, helping assure effective learning impact at a reasonable cost. And like everything else in the business, vendor performance is measured and evaluated on a regular basis, to help guarantee ongoing success.

Design & Build

Effective Learning Organizations are on top of learning trends and leverage a broad mix of tools and methods to create multi-modal and blended learning solutions. They create learning that goes beyond just foundational knowledge, and include application, practice, pull-through, and performance support.

Technology Management

Learning Management Systems, Learning Content Management Systems, and Learning Portals are the technology backbone that supports the learning organization. In an Effective Learning Organizations, technology enables both guided and self-directed learning. Technology tools are used for maximum impact, driving real-time performance support and analysis and evaluation of how learning impacts the business.

Learning Execution

One size does not fit all; is learning tailored to an individual's need and interest? Is there more than one learning path? Is learning available on-demand or at the point-of-need? Does learning provide clear application, practice, and pull-through?

Conclusion

Effective Learning Organizations are not born; they are built, brick by brick. The attributes listed in this white paper do not make up the entirety of an Effective Learning Organization; rather, they are the foundation, the solid base on which Effective Learning Organizations are built. Very few organizations are strong in every area, so don't be concerned if you see gaps in your own group; identifying the gaps is a necessary first step in making process improvements. Look for those attributes where making a change will create the most benefit. Perhaps the most important attribute of Effective Learning Organizations is that they are part of the mainstream of the business—not a support organization. Effective Learning Organizations have a “seat at the table” and are a major driver of their company's success.



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