

STRATEGY BRIEF

Going from Learning to Earning: How to Measure the Impact of Learning

2023



Learning & Development



Talent Management



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



Leadership Development



Talent Acquisition



Workforce Management/HR



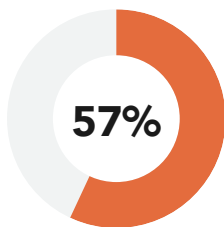
Future of Work

CURRENT STATE

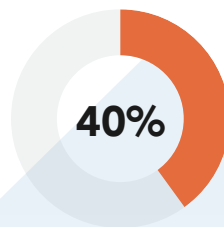
For many years, Learning and Development (L&D) has been trying to demonstrate the value of learning. It has modernized the services it provides, reorganized its distribution methods for greater efficiency, and professionalized its measurement processes. But it is still failing. This raises some important questions: Should we continue to focus on the value of learning? Or is this time to redefine the future of L&D and focus on business value?

Brandon Hall Group™ research confirms the challenge that learning measurement continues to present to learning teams. In fact, of the three most common challenges that Learning organizations continue to face, measuring the effectiveness of learning remains number one, with 57% of responses. The other two related challenges are managing all the priorities being presented by the business and the perennial budget constraints.

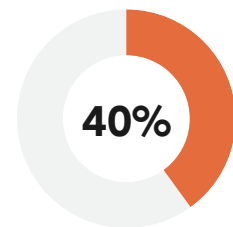
The three most common challenges to Learning organizations are:



Ability to measure the effectiveness of learning



Managing all learning priorities from the business



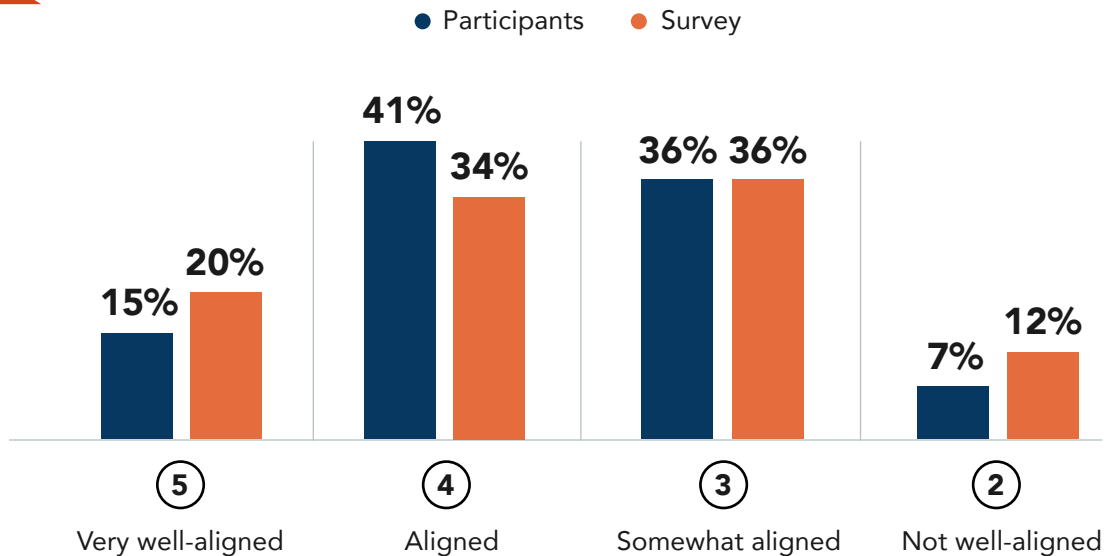
Limited budget

Our recent pulse survey, *“Think Like a CEO: How Learning Drives Business Impact,”* further reveals that most L&D teams still struggle with key aspects of a measurement strategy like gaining access to data or being able to pull the right data. LMS integration with core business systems remains a huge area of opportunity as well.

In a recent [webinar](#), Brandon Hall Group™ Platinum Preferred Provider EI powered by MPS brought together learning and HR leaders to look at this challenge more directly. As part of the webinar experience, participants were asked to weigh in on three survey questions related to learning measurement and organizational performance. The results were telling.



Please rate how well-aligned your Learning function is in supporting your organization's performance goals.



Does your organization have a strategy or standardized approach for learning measurement?

Only about one-third of respondents indicated they do have a strategy in place. Most (46%) are working on it. Surprisingly, over 20% indicated they do not have a strategy and are not working on one.



Does your learning measurement strategy include a definitive focus on linking learning to individual or organizational performance?

Nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they do have a focus on linking learning to performance or they are working on it.

COMPLEXITIES

Clearly measurement continues to be a work in progress. And while that is a hopeful sign, the reality is that organizations cannot afford for Learning teams to continue lagging behind other areas of the business in documenting their impact on results. As margins become tighter, there will be less and less room for so-called “nice to have” learning support. All learning must have a defined impact on OKR’s (Organizational Key Results).

Most Learning teams have mastered strategy, content, personalization, and learner experience to some degree. Measurement continues to lag because of the way we approach development. Many times, the approach to development starts with the learner and their need to learn something or develop some capability to be more effective. Often this is based on manager feedback and perception with some anecdotal performance data thrown in when we have it. This approach almost never includes organizational-level data and is generally localized to the employee.

From there, addressing the right content to the right learner in the best possible way becomes easier.

CONSEQUENCES

Because organizations are disconnected in their approach to learning measurement, what often happens is the focus is on measuring the wrong things. Most L&D organizations can build beautiful dashboards showing learning activity, learner satisfaction, maybe even some knowledge-based test scores. Nothing wrong with those metrics, other than the fact they don’t transfer to real business outcomes.

L&D leaders should start from the paradigm that learning solves a business problem and that business problem is having a known impact on business results. Through that lens, L&D leaders can more readily show the tangible value of learning programs. Calculating true ROI (Return on Investment) and ROE (Return on Expectation) against the corresponding movement in the business result.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Organizations wanting to better tie their learning function's impact to business impact need to ask themselves several questions, including:

What business metrics are we using besides just completion rates and smile sheets?

What business problems are we helping to solve?

Are we becoming more proficient at measuring learning year after year?

What technology are we using to compile analytics to make our business case?

How can Learning use analytics to gain the respect of leadership and show that we are a true partner when it comes to business performance?

BRANDON HALL GROUP POV

1 Think Like a CEO

Your deliverables are the company's deliverables, and your team has a critical role to play in the success of the business in the long term. Learning impacts business results. 60% of our survey respondents shared that by becoming more proficient at measuring learning's impact on performance, they are now viewed as a more strategic partner.

2 Make Your Case for Technology

Excel and PowerPoint presentations are not enough anymore. Do your research and show how everything from a simple LMS to advanced analytics can make a difference from start to finish. Build a partnership and relationship with your company's Data Management team and work to have learning included in the scope of any work being undertaken on behalf of the company.

3 Know What You're Measuring

Your learning measurement strategy should be the same across the organization. Make sure everyone is using the same systems and metrics to gather and analyze data; otherwise, you could end up comparing apples to oranges.

4 Measure More than Once

One-and-done measurement of a class or course isn't enough. Show how learning helped employees go from point A to B to C, instead of just showing what happened at the finish line. Based on the learning need, you should define the ongoing measurement plan to follow up with relevant performance metrics post learning to show progress over time.

5 Be in it for the Long Haul

Many organizations don't measure learning because they don't even know what they're looking for. Stick to a proven strategy — or fail quickly with one that's not working. But stick with learning measurement. Many of our respondents tell us they have shown an increase in proficiency — with learners and well as their Learning function itself — from just two years ago.

CONCLUSION

Telling an effective story of how learning drives business impact does not happen overnight. Consider starting with one of your more visible programs or choose to start with the next program on the schedule. Begin somewhere and refine your processes as you go. The more you work at it, the better you will be at identifying the data you need, collecting that data, and presenting the insights gained.

You may be tempted to talk yourself out of presenting certain findings or data because learning wasn't the only part of the solution applied to the original business problem. Don't allow this to happen to you. Learning is rarely the only response to a need and it is almost never the only way to solve a problem. That is not the point. The point is that where employees engage with learning, there should be tangible evidence that they have improved. If they have, in fact, improved there should be a clear impact on results. Correlation is strong enough. Learning measurement is not about proving causation.

As you start on this journey, consider these potential actions to take as a first step. These were gathered from input during a webinar hosted in September.

LEARN
MORE



- Conduct thorough needs assessments and root cause analysis to understand the true performance gaps and needs. This will help ensure training is targeting the right issues.
- Align learning programs tightly to business goals and strategy. Training should be solving pressing business problems. Work closely with business leaders to define success metrics.
- Measure both learning (skills/knowledge gained) and on-the-job behavior change. Learning without behavior change will not drive business impact.
- Leverage data and analytics to demonstrate impact. Tie learning data to business KPIs.
- Adopt learner-centric design approaches to drive engagement and relevance. Emotional intelligence is key.
- Educate stakeholders on realistic expectations of training impact and timelines. Create governance processes.
- Continuously collect feedback from learners, managers, business leaders to improve programs.
- Explore new, agile learning approaches like microlearning, mobile, on-demand, and just-in-time learning.

Work is continuing to evolve. As it does, the way we support and prepare our team members to be successful in their work will have to evolve as well. Learning teams must become truly data-driven in their approach to planning and decision-making. The best way to do that is to ensure a strong measurement strategy is in place. Only then can you hope to be the be the trusted strategic partner your leadership needs for you to be.

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