

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Learning Alignment in an Uncertain and Disrupted Business Climate

By: Alexandra Levit, Chairman, DeVry University Career Advisory Board

When speaking with a Chief Learning Officer at a Fortune 500 industrial equipment organization, I heard a leader who was both stressed out and inspired. She described how, after years of struggling to maintain her L&D budget, her function was now center stage. The CEO had a narrow set of strategies in mind to keep the business afloat during COVID-19, and he needed the CLO to quickly develop learning experiences to help employees execute on those strategies.

The CLO's plan includes bite-sized trainings on skills employees have never used before, from self-scheduling to virtual collaboration. And, since the business has shifted more toward e-commerce, she's developing a program to bring all employees up to speed on the essential digital tools.

Increased L&D investment isn't purely a consequence of the pandemic. According to [LinkedIn's 2020 Workplace Learning Report](#) – issued prior to the crisis – nearly 60 percent of surveyed L&D professionals expected to increase their online and virtual learning offerings in 2020. Just under three years ago, that number was 27 percent.

But since COVID-19, the [TrainingIndustry.com website](#), which targets corporate L&D professionals, has seen a 8,135 percent increase in topics related to [remote learning](#), [virtual instructor-led training \(VILT\)](#), and [leading through adversity](#), indicating that appetite for guidance has increased exponentially. In the current climate, business priorities are constantly shifting, and skill mastery must occur rapidly and with unprecedented agility. The corporate L&D function is more critical than ever because no team is better positioned to drive skills outcomes in line with overall business objectives.

My partners at DeVryWORKS recently introduced the concept of learning alignment. When an organization is learning-aligned, L&D enables business strategy and measures learning initiatives' success in transforming the organization.

DeVryWORKS' Sr. Director of Strategic Accounts, Duane Glader suggests that organizations are learning-aligned if they've implemented a continuous process to map the learning strategy to the business strategy, which may include:

- Documenting learning or training requirements for new initiatives and planning rollouts in a way that integrates effectively with the whole.
- Affiliating learning professionals with business units or geographic areas.
- Including L&D components in all change management initiatives.
- Creating flexible programs that can be instantly adjusted as business priorities change.
- Leveraging analytics tools to quantify learning program impact on business performance.

As a human capital expert, I have observed that a lack of alignment may result in diminished business performance, higher levels of employee confusion and disengagement, and poorer retention. Now that COVID-19 has ushered in a new era for L&D, we have an opportunity – and some might say a duty – to uplevel the function. DeVryWORKS named the following six areas as essential to learning alignment:

Business Relevance

The L&D team is clear on current and pressing business objectives and the HR organization is empowered to attract and retain top talent and fill skills gaps to execute on these objectives.

Awareness

Targeted employees or employee groups understand the L&D resources and opportunities available to them and where to access them. Awareness increases participation in learning programs, which cascades into higher levels of engagement and productivity.

“Skill requirements will be in flux for the foreseeable future, and what your organization needs today may well be different than what it needs tomorrow.

Management Support

Aligned organizations spread learning messages far and wide. C-level leaders publicly promote L&D offerings and evaluates managers based on the learning outcomes of their direct reports.

Utilization

Targeted employees or employee groups actively take advantage of L&D opportunities because learning is presented in a variety of formats that people can consume on their own time.

KPIs

Working in concert with c-level leaders, L&D has established success metrics and put tools in place to ensure consistent monitoring of performance.

Resources

Organizations secure and maintain enough L&D staff and budget to develop relevant and impactful programs.

Like many aspects of the COVID-19 business world, learning alignment requires ongoing vigilance and oversight. The process of mapping learning to business strategy, gaining c-level buy-in, communicating learning availability and benefits, and demonstrating impact must be repeated and honed as your culture evolves and your company transitions out of the current crisis. Skill requirements will be in flux for the foreseeable future, and what your organization needs today may well be different than what it needs tomorrow.

In my opinion, learning leaders who use this time of disruption as an opening to think differently and try a new approach may be rewarded with a more stable organization and a workforce that is proactive and enthusiastic about upskilling as the business demands.

Are you wondering how your organization compares to its peers with respect to learning alignment? How does learning alignment look in practice? What steps have your peers taken to transform their learning function from order taker to business enabler? Stay tuned for the results of DeVryWORKS' and Human Capital Media's Strategic Learning Alignment survey, to be released later this year.

DeVryWORKS

Workforce Solutions to Attract, Acquire and Develop Talent

At DeVryWORKS, we understand that one of the biggest challenges of any business is not only hiring skilled people but also providing opportunities to help them grow in their careers. DeVryWORKS seeks to truly understand your organization's training and development needs so we can offer solutions to help you acquire and retain strong talent, plan for succession, and close the skills gap. www.devryworks.com.