

SHAPING AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING STRATEGY

BY MICHELLE OCKERS

While it's always important to have a current organisational learning strategy, NOW is the perfect time to create or refresh your strategy.

We've seen rapid, large-scale change in organisations the past 12-18 months. Clearly there was a need for learning and development to support organisations to respond to the pandemic. And it created the opportunity to make changes that many have aspired to for a long time. It's time to consolidate and leverage these shifts by creating or refreshing your learning strategy – while the window is still open.

WHAT IS AN ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING STRATEGY?

An organisational learning strategy is your overarching approach to learning in an organisation to support the implementation of the business strategy.

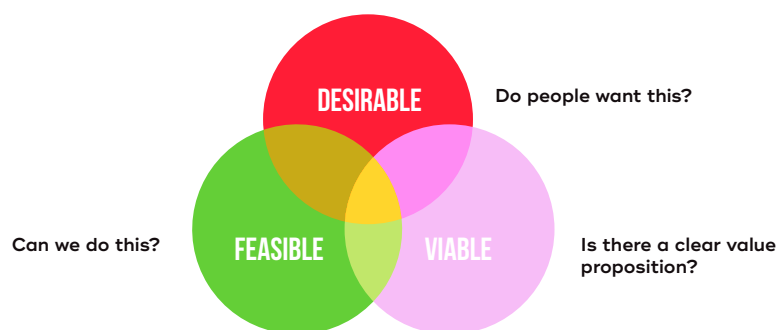
It is not to be confused with the approach being taken for a specific learning solution, which is also sometimes called a 'strategy'. Of course, your organisational learning strategy will inform the design of specific solutions.

HALLMARKS OF A GOOD LEARNING STRATEGY

A robust learning strategy ensures that:

- learning is fully aligned to business goals
- investment in learning adds value to your organisation
- your workforce has the required skills and knowledge to perform current roles well
- they can reskill to provide workforce mobility and upskill to future-proof your organisation, and your people feel supported by the organisation and want to stay with you.

A well-crafted learning strategy offers a compelling vision for learning in your organisation. It is also viable, in the sense that it provides a clear value proposition with a pathway to achieve it. Finally, it is feasible, given factors such as resource, budget, L&D capability and technology. Taking an evidence-informed approach will help you to develop and implement a strategy that is desirable, viable and feasible.



Hallmarks of a good learning strategy (adapted from Crowdfavorite.com)

AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS

An evidence-informed approach will not only help you to develop a learning strategy that is a great fit for your organisation and its people, it will also safeguard you against some common pitfalls:

- 1)** Copying or adapting someone else's strategy without regard to your organisation's context.
- 2)** Motherhood statements that make your strategy too theoretical, rather than concrete and actionable.
- 3)** Creating a strategy as an L&D or human resources team in isolation, disconnected with the real world and needs of your stakeholders.

Drawing upon evidence sets you up to develop a strategy that is concrete, grounded in the reality of workplaces across your organisation and addresses both business goals and the needs and preferences of your people. More specifically, conducting research helps you to:

- challenge assumptions about how your people experience learning and are willing to engage with it
- overcome biases based on your own expertise and past success as an L&D professional
- leverage diverse perspectives to gain deeper insight
- bring the outside in to explore new options and possibilities and learn from the experience of others
- create a compelling value proposition and case for change.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Evidence is data that is relevant and leads to conclusions – in this case about the vision and value proposition for learning in your organisation and what it will take to achieve it.

Data can be sourced from within your organisation (internal) or outside of it (external). It may also be quantitative (numerical, statistical, structured) or qualitative (descriptive, non-numerical, unstructured). A well-rounded strategy research plan will include a balance of data sources and types. Below are some of the data sources that could inform your learning strategy.

	QUALITATIVE DATA	QUANTITATIVE DATA
INTERNAL DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business strategy• Annual report• Learner survey• Focus groups• Stakeholder interviews• Learning culture assessment• Design walkthroughs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business performance data• Employee engagement/ pulse survey• Learning analytics• Capability/ skills data• Learner survey• Course/ program catalogue data
EXTERNAL DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case studies – sources include podcasts, articles, conference presentations, books• Networking/ consultation with L&D teams in other organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry reports relevant to your organisation• L&D industry reports• Learning benchmark reports

CREATE A RESEARCH PLAN

Rather than head straight into a workshop to develop your learning strategy, make some time to diagnose your current state and explore possibilities first. Ask yourself, ‘what do we currently know?’ and ‘what do we need to know?’.

Great sources to start with include:

- Existing data
- Desktop review
- Survey
- Discussion
- Human-centred design interview/workshop
- Capability review
- L&D maturity assessment
- Course inventory
- Case studies
- Benchmarking
- Research review

“ EVIDENCE IS DATA THAT IS RELEVANT AND LEADS TO CONCLUSIONS ”

Consider including the following aspects in your research plan:

- **Organisational context** – business strategy, performance goals, physical and virtual workplace environment, operating rhythm, organisational culture and values, leadership style, systems and technology, end-to-end human resources/talent management practices.
- **Industry context** – competitiveness, regulation, technology, labour market, unionisation, required qualifications, licenses and continuous professional development (CPD), emerging skills, disruptive forces, and other trends.
- **Workforce** – range of roles, nature of work (e.g., safety, risk, complexity, shift patterns), employment arrangements, demographics, skill levels and workforce mobility, what they currently think/feel/do regarding performance improvement, learning and career development.
- **Managers** – as per workforce, plus what they think/feel/do regarding supporting their teams and team members with performance improvement, learning and career development.
- **Leaders** – as per managers plus perceived value of learning and expectations of L&D.
- **L&D team(s)** – roles, structure, capacity, capability and mindset.
- **Learning ecosystem** – learning approaches/channels, resources, technology and information architecture, communities and networks, internal and external partnerships.
- **L&D practice** – evidence-informed practices, case studies and benchmarking.

An evidence-informed approach is a solid investment

Sound research can be accomplished in a matter of weeks, rather than months, and is an investment that will yield strong returns. This is especially the case where you start by reviewing existing data, discriminately identify what gaps you need to fill and seek a balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative data gathered from internal and external sources. Your research activity also provides a significant opportunity to collaborate with key stakeholders, building buy-in progressively as you develop your strategy.



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FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Elevate 08: Introduction to Organisational Learning Strategy (Michelle Ockers, 2021, Learning Uncut)
<https://learninguncut.global/podcast/elevate-08/>

Introduction to Organisational Learning Strategy (Michelle Ockers, 2021, Learning Uncut)
<https://learninguncut.global/introduction-to-organisational-learning-strategy/>

Learning Performance Benchmark (Mind Tools for Business) <https://emeraldworks.com/research/learning-performance-benchmark>

The Value of Balancing Desirability, Feasibility, and Viability (Alex Cristache, 2020, Crowd Favorite)
<https://crowdfavorite.com/the-value-of-balancing-desirability-feasibility-and-viability>