

A Maturity Model for High Impact

Building a world-class learning function is a never-ending process • BY JOSH BERSIN



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In the last few years corporate training has become more complicated, difficult and confusing than ever. Bersin & Associates' 2012 High-Impact Learning Organization research illustrates this. When asked to list the top three priorities for learning and development going forward, organizations had very little agreement.

The main reason is that no two learning organizations are really alike. They evolve over time. So, if you want to make your training team better, you have to start with where you are today and develop your own roadmap.

This is why Bersin & Associates built a maturity model for corporate training. In our latest research, which spanned almost 18 months and involved more

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than 400 organizations, we characterized the typical training team into four maturity levels:

Incidental training: The first level is what happens when there are very few training professionals around — on-the-job training, often delivered by managers or teammates. When you walk into a new job and there is no on-boarding or training available, you sit down with your manager, who shows you what to do.

This incidental training takes place in every business and function. Managers teach workers and employees teach each other. And when someone flubs up, he or she learns from experience.

We, as learning professionals, have to understand that incidental training will always take place, and our first goal is to professionalize this as fast as possible. Give the team checklists, competency models, core programs and other forms of content that make this training more consistent, scalable and relevant to the learner.

Learning and development training excellence: The second level is the process of professionalizing training. This is a big phase, and it takes time. This is where companies build a training function or a corporate university. They buy standard tools and technology and establish standards — what we call a learning architecture.

Most companies have many learning teams at various stages of this level. The sales training group may be very sophisticated at program development and delivery, but may not yet be able to measure impact well. The leadership development function is likely to be highly experiential and blended, but may not use virtual and online content well.

Level two is a journey in itself, because this is when companies have to deal with roles, governance, leadership, standards, measurement and innovation levels. When should we dip our toes in mobile learning? How do we leverage social tools and the social enterprise to amplify the training and learning experience?

Talent and performance improvement: At some point the organization starts to realize that training alone is not enough. When you become very good at developing and delivering content, measuring it and scaling through the use of technology, you start worrying about how to make learning more continuous and available.

This is the third stage, where the organization starts to rearrange its content and focus on alignment by role. In sales training, for example, what is the right level of training for junior sales people, senior product specialists, account executives, managers and vice presidents?

In this stage the organization often reorganizes corporate learning and aligns it with the talent management team. While performance-driven programs continue to exist, the company arranges and rationalizes much of its content toward job roles and career paths.

Organizational capability development: After several years of work in the third level, companies evolve to organizational capability development. This is where learning teams no longer think about skills or proficiencies by role but look broadly at the organizational and individual capabilities needed to succeed.

For example, in consulting firms, technical skills are very important. But the company doesn't succeed with these skills alone. Consulting firms must develop capabilities in project management, proposal development, client relationship management and other broad areas. These capabilities are developed through coaching, knowledge sharing and role-specific support, delivered locally in the business.

Remember that building a world-class learning function is a never-ending process, and you must always start where you are and continue to look forward in your efforts to make your company more effective. **CLO**