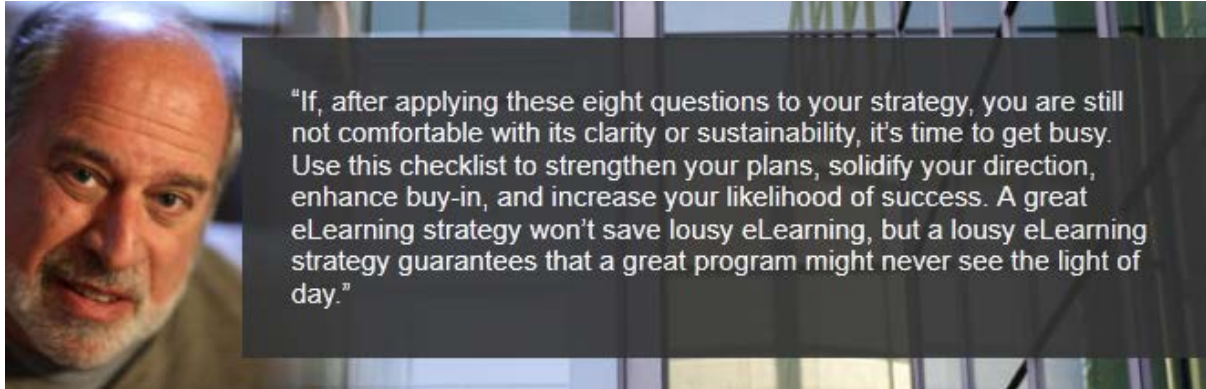


Testing your eLearning Strategy (Nov 12)

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Is your eLearning strategy any good? Is it sustainable over the long term? Does it sound nice, but has nothing to back it up? Or have you actually thought this through clearly and are on your way to achieving your goals? Let's find out.

I recently came across a great article in the *McKinsey Quarterly* (January 2011), [Have You Tested Your Strategy Lately?](#) The authors suggest 10 questions to answer in determining the effectiveness of any strategy. I took eight of these and applied them to eLearning.

1. Are you clear on the customers of your strategy?

Training professionals (including eLearning professionals) often confuse customers with consumers. In most situations, the customer is the person who *pays*—the client or executive sponsor, for example. They are the ones who are backing the effort. Learners, for the most part, are the consumers of the program. While both groups should benefit from the initiative, never forget that it's the customer who is taking the bulk of the risk (along with you, of course).

2. Does your strategy tap a true source of advantage?

Too often, eLearning initiatives include a vast catalog of courses that sometimes duplicate classroom programs or are provided just in case they are needed. If you cannot demonstrate that the effort is yielding *value* as defined by your customer, why are you bothering? One program that truly changes the direction of an organization may be much more valuable than a cornucopia of programs that sit in an LMS just waiting for someone to enroll.

3. Does your strategy put you ahead of trends?

It's natural at times to be cautious in terms of what you want to do and what you expect to achieve. It's quite another to be completely risk-averse. Waiting until everyone else is committed to eLearning, social learning, performance support, etc., guarantees that you will consistently be a follower, equipped with yesterday's solutions to tomorrow's challenges. Holding back until technology improves is a never-ending quest. Technology is always changing, always improving. The key is to jump in, get started, and prepare for continuous improvement.

4. Does your strategy balance commitment and flexibility?

Dogmatic approaches rarely work. Tunnel vision towards one particular technology, product, or process often makes us blind to new opportunities and new ways to get things done. On the other hand, too many initiatives and too many tools or approaches can waste time and resources. Develop

a plan and stick to it, but don't ignore signs that it's not working. Keep in mind a proverb from the Old West, "When you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount."

5. Does your strategy balance expectations with resources and time?

Promising the moon sounds great for a while, but when you can't get there, the crash can be deafening. Let's move everything to eLearning! We can convert the entire curriculum in a month! No problem getting our 5,000 salespeople to take the course by the end of the week! Heard any of these? Good eLearning strategy walks a fine and difficult line—seeking to over-deliver without over-promising, all within a budget that is usually front-loaded with costs. Embarking on an eLearning project, especially a large one, without a solid business plan and business case that sizes it to realistic resources and expectations that all stakeholders can support, is a recipe for disaster.

6. Is your strategy contaminated by bias?

eLearning that looks too much like the classroom version, or reflects someone's preconceived notion of what it is, rather than what it should be, can have a devastating impact on eLearning strategy. Too many organizations try to shovel processes used successfully in classroom training onto an eLearning project. Training is training, right? Evaluation methods don't change much, and the nature of interactivity often fails to take into consideration the unique capabilities of a quality eLearning design. The result is a product that looks awfully like its classroom counterpart, with the emphasis on *awful*.

7. Is there real conviction to act on your strategy?

When some executive sponsors say they believe in eLearning, they really mean it. But for others, their words don't match their actions. This can be a real problem when trying to implement an eLearning program that is sustainable. Conviction to act is not something that's needed only in the executive suite. Your client or customer's level of conviction, especially at the front line, is essential as well. Are they involved in this project out of belief that it's the right thing to do, or were they told to do it and really couldn't care less? But the Achilles' heel here may be the conviction of your own training organization. Do your people really believe in your strategy? Do *you*?

8. Have you translated your strategy into an action plan?

The ancient Chinese military general and strategist Sun Tzu said, "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory; tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." Both strategy and tactics are needed, but we often confuse the two. For example, getting a new LMS may seem strategic, in terms of cost and scope, but it is more likely a tactic, designed to enable more efficient learning and performance, which is the strategy. A good eLearning strategy talks about a goal state—what you want to achieve. Then you develop tactics and operational action plans to get you there.

What shape is your eLearning strategy in?

If, after applying these eight questions to your strategy, you are still not comfortable with its clarity or sustainability, it's time to get busy. Use this checklist (and the McKinsey article as background) to strengthen your plans, solidify your direction, enhance buy-in, and increase your likelihood of success. A great eLearning strategy won't save lousy eLearning, but a lousy eLearning strategy guarantees that a great program might never see the light of day. .