

# Building Successful Corporate Elearning Programs

Features, Benefits, Results

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations increasingly provide employees with learning and development that benefits the bottom line. Research shows that high-performing companies and nonprofits are three times more likely than others to foster a strong learning culture (Bersin & Associates).

More and more, organizations use elearning to reduce training costs, provide just-in-time skills instruction, and supplement in-person, classroom-based training. Online learning can help employees perform better on the job, successfully assume leadership roles, support organizational goals, and more.

To help employees learn new skills, retain what they learn, and use their new knowledge, elearning content must be accessible and engaging.

A training solution that delivers strong return on investment (ROI) features:

- Up-to-date content
  - Expert teachers
  - Engaging delivery
  - The ability to integrate with a learning management system (LMS)
  - Robust reporting
  - Mobile accessibility
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### CORPORATE ELEARNING: THE WAVE OF THE HERE AND NOW

In 2013, nearly 42 percent of Fortune 500 companies used technology during formal learning hours (Ibis Capital). That same year, elearning was a \$56.2 billion industry. This figure was expected to more than double by 2015 (Global Industry Analysts).

The reason for this growing popularity is simple: elearning offers a multitude of benefits to employees and organizations.

According to the study *E-Learning Market Trends & Forecast*, elearning:

- Keeps employees aligned with role requirements and organizational goals
- Makes training more cost-effective
- Supports succession planning amid attrition, retirements, and leadership turnover
- Assists employee recruitment and retention (Docebo)

## Professional Development

In today's competitive market, organizations often look for ways to support professional development. Workers who are provided training that relates to their jobs and supports personal growth are more likely to feel completely engaged and connected to the workplace. Those who are not provided this training are more likely to move on, according to research by the Harvard Business Review.

*Dissatisfaction with some employee development efforts appears to fuel many early exits. . . Workers reported that companies generally satisfy their needs for on-the-job development and that they value these opportunities, which include high-visibility positions and significant increases in responsibility. But they're not getting much in the way of formal development, such as training, mentoring, and coaching—things they also value highly. (Hamori)*

Universum, a branding firm that helps employers attract top talent, reports that the most common differentiator of top talent is a drive to continuously learn. Elearning offers employees training that is literally at their fingertips, meeting the needs and fulfilling the desires of workers who want to develop important skills (Universum).

## Cost-Effectiveness

Quality, effective elearning can reduce a range of expenses.

- **Training costs:** Producing learning content consumes time. If a course can be accessed without having to put more time into its development, ROI increases. With elearning, many people can access one course multiple times. In addition, delivery is standardized and consistent.
- **Material and travel costs:** A dedicated class space, live teachers, and hard copies of materials are not required for elearning. Instruction can take place online, eliminating the inefficiencies and expense of offsite training.
- **Schedule-related costs:** Because elearning can be controlled, it's possible to schedule training during downtimes or economic off-seasons (Articulate).

## Leadership Development

CEOs surveyed in a recent study by DDI and The Conference Board reported that human capital continues to be one of their most significant and worrisome challenges. In particular, many CEOs said talent pools for leadership succession lack depth, and that they were uncertain about who would lead their organizations in the future. Only 27 percent of CEOs considered would-be leaders to be very prepared (DDI World). Likewise, a Job Preparedness Indicator study by the Career Advisory Board at DeVry University found that only 18 percent of hiring managers who identify and hire senior-level employees were able to find internal or external candidates with skills and traits required for open positions. That's a ratio of about one in five (Freifeld).

The CEOs reported that leadership development efforts at their organizations had stalled, and that they were dissatisfied with training efforts. As a result, leaders were not emerging quickly enough, and employees were unprepared to take over more senior-level roles and responsibilities. The CEOs said their organizations were too focused on providing foundational skills training instead of training focused on the most critical skills—including managing and successfully introducing change, fostering employee creativity and innovation, and leading across countries and cultures (DDI World).

What was needed, the study found, was the removal of barriers to learning, and to better align learning with job roles. Learning moments needed to match what employees experience or may soon experience. In addition, the study found that improving the connection between training and the learner's own personal development plans would have a positive impact on employee performance and retention (DDI World).

## Employee Dispersion

A globally dispersed workforce brings training implementation difficulties. Not only are some employees traveling more—and internationally—but companies are hiring workers from an array of cultures in diverse locations. Cultural, language, and philosophical differences challenge even the most forward-thinking training departments.

When organizations go multinational or global, training and learning must evolve. Thanks to the growing prevalence of technology, elearning provides a way to accommodate that evolution. Still, several factors should be considered before any implementation. For example, cultural and language differences need attention, as well as the cultural context of the learning. Certain colors carry negative connotations in some cultures, as do the use of cartoon characters or caricatures. Special attention also needs to be focused on building trust between the user and the learning content (Harrison).

In addition, each office location will have its own unique needs. With language a barrier, translations from English often suffer (Harrison). Involving native speakers and writers in the translation process can prevent unintentional miscommunications of critical information.

## The Skills Gap

Research illustrates the ongoing employee “skills gap” faced by organizations of all types, and related data sheds light on the competition for talent that this phenomenon has sparked:

- In a recent study, 49 percent of US employers said they have trouble filling mission-critical positions. Jobs in engineering, information technology and skilled trades posed the biggest challenge (Freifeld).
- A 2012 Tech Trends report by IBM showed that only 10 percent of organizations had employees with the skills needed to utilize advanced technologies such as business analytics, social business, and cloud and mobile computing (Freifeld).

What can be done to close these skill gaps? Elearning is a key solution, particularly when it supports an overall business strategy. And it’s not enough to simply identify the gaps; rather, each needs to be addressed, according to Don Keller, chief learning officer at SCC Soft Computer. Keller has described training as an investment applicable to new hires and longer-term workers. In other words, incumbent employees should be provided with opportunities to improve or gain skills to be considered for advancement (Freifeld).

A CareerBuilder study called Talent Crunch found that 41 percent of organizations have initiatives in place to close skill gaps, including traditional schooling, elearning, and mentoring programs (Freifeld).

## Succession Planning

Succession planning is critical at any organization, but it is often not given the attention and care it deserves. Many companies do not have adequate processes in place. When a CEO, for example, steps down, is released, or retires, it becomes obvious how critical succession planning can be. A deep pool of candidates is needed. But it’s too late to develop a plan when times are tough or leadership is on its way out the door.

Only 46 percent of respondent companies had a formal process for developing candidates for key executive positions, according to a study by the Stanford Graduate School of Business. And only 25 percent of respondents identified an adequate pool of candidates ready to succeed a CEO (Stanford Graduate School of Business).

Companies often plan for succession with a shortsighted goal of reducing the risk of an open position rather than spending time to identify and thoroughly develop leaders, according to the study.

*Respondents are more likely to view this activity in terms of its potential to reduce future downside risk rather than producing shareholder value benefits from the identification of strong and appropriate leadership. This is due in part to the scrutiny of regulators, rating agencies, and other market participants that emphasize the risk management and loss-minimization aspects—rather than [the] value-creating elements—of succession. (Stanford Graduate School of Business)*

Organizations need a system for recruiting potential replacements or identifying internal talent long before a position opens. An elearning program can play a key role in supporting this effort, offering employees knowledge and skills that prepare them for increasingly important roles.

## Recruiting and Onboarding

Attracting and retaining top talent is a challenge in today’s competitive job market. All sectors are competing for talent, including for talent found in younger generations entering the workplace. Elearning can help corporations win that competition.

By 2020, Millennials will comprise nearly half (46 percent) of the US workforce on a fast track to becoming the largest generation represented (Bureau of Labor). Millennials ranked professional training and career development among their top five criteria influencing an employment decision, according to a Universum study. Likewise, a Partnership for Public Service survey found that an opportunity for personal growth is the number one attribute recent college grads look for in a position.

This emphasis on learning doesn't end once a job offer is accepted.

In addition to providing basic information on how to succeed professionally, onboarding plays a crucial role in shaping new employee's perceptions of an organization's expectations and culture.

Organizations lost almost one quarter of all new employees within a year, according to the *Allied Workforce Mobility Survey: Onboarding and Retention*. Major contributing factors were underperforming onboarding programs and lack of training. The study indicates that the cost of not training new employees properly is steep. Filling one position costs on average \$10,731 not including relocation costs, which alone can reach more than \$20,000.

Best-in-class companies that prioritize quality onboarding had employees who were more likely to stay at least a year, meet or exceed corporate productivity goals, and eventually become corporate leaders or influencers (Allied).

## ELEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

As research shows, technology-based learning in the workplace offers a wide range of benefits. With these benefits come numerous considerations. The quality of elearning content, or lack thereof, can make or break an organization's ROI. In addition to quality content, the use of an LMS, authoring tools, and mobile learning can enhance the elearning experience.

### Engaging Elearning Leads to Successful Elearning

Not all online learning content is created equal. Ask anyone who has participated in non-engaging, "click-

to-continue," slide-style online tutorials—or even plain, text-based courses.

Laura Overton of Towards Maturity discussed this in her presentation *Engaging the Disengaged*, stating that learner engagement is the key to successful elearning. She noted that "44 percent of learning and development leaders say their staff is reluctant to engage with online learning." But reality doesn't bear that out. In fact, research shows that 75 percent of learners are happy to engage with online learning without prompting. The problem isn't elearning, per se. On the contrary, companies fail to succeed with elearning when the content they deliver isn't engaging (Brown).

It's easy to understand why employees are reluctant to spend time on slide-style online tutorials, especially if the training is mandated annually. Redundancy can be frustrating. If it is not engaging, training can inspire procrastination.

Visuals can play a big part in inspiring engagement. Consider this: 90 percent of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and the brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text (Parkinson). People often seek out visuals, including video, to access information in their everyday lives. In fact, watching online videos is now a mainstream activity. Seventy-eight percent of people watch online videos at least once a week, and 55 percent watch them every day. This is why YouTube™ is the second most popular search engine after Google™ for both entertainment and educational content (Brown).

Video content can be watched and re-watched as needed. This lets users revisit content they may have initially misunderstood, reinforces information users learned previously, and can increase knowledge retention.

### Technology Integration

Key components of a corporate elearning strategy are a content delivery system and related technologies that allow content customization, such as authoring tools or learning content management.

A learning management system (LMS) uses software applications to administer, track, and report on elearning. LMS use is changing as technology evolves and elearning grows in popularity. One feature of the latest LMS technology is an ability to track the activity of learners who are training at work or away, for example at home.

This allows more flexibility for employees to engage in learning on their own time. As a result, employees can learn at their own pace when the time is optimal.

According to Bersin & Associates report *Learning Management Systems 2013: The Definitive Buyer's Guide to the Global Market for Learning Management Solutions*, organizations spent between \$1.8 and \$1.9 billion on LMS technology in 2013. Before choosing an LMS vendor, an organization should consider the cost and time it takes to integrate a system into an existing IT infrastructure. Content that is LMS-agnostic is another key consideration, because selecting content that is only compatible with a specific LMS can be limiting.

Cloud-based LMS platforms rank among the top seven future elearning technology trends (Pappas). Using these, organizations no longer need to download and install course materials. Instead, courses can be accessed on demand from a centralized location, usually in the cloud.

“Providers will be able to offer cloud stored, individual elearning modules or even full elearning courses as packets that can be purchased and downloaded on demand. . . . The increasing demand for affordable, global training will be addressed by cloud-based technology, which will streamline corporate training processes and create tailor-made solutions for smaller businesses.”

- Christopher Pappas, eLearning Industry

Application program interfaces, or APIs, are another technology consideration. These allow for the collection of data from the wide range of learning experiences of a person or group. With an API, learning activity can start virtually anywhere but still be tracked by an LMS. Elearning delivery systems that are API-compatible can provide an added level of recording and reporting that other systems cannot.

Mobile learning also was identified as one of the top seven elearning technology trends of the future (Pappas). Mobile learning accommodates more flexible learning schedules.

## Convenient, On-Demand Access

By the end of 2014, the number of mobile-connected devices was expected to reach into the billions and exceed the human population, according to a study by

Cisco. By 2018, the number of mobile devices expected to be online globally was nearly 1.4 per capita (Cisco).

The use of mobile devices is not just a flash-in-the-pan trend, especially as Wi-Fi connectivity becomes more accessible, technology grows more user-friendly, and younger generations are raised with mobile devices as part of everyday life. In a 2013 study, 74 percent of Generation Y workers said they had used a mobile device for work purposes during the preceding year, compared to 37 percent of Baby Boomers (CompTIA).

Workplace expectations for mobile learning are high. A study by Towards Maturity found that more than 90 percent of respondents want mobile learning to:

- Increase learning accessibility and flexibility
- Increase on-the-job productivity
- Support organizational change and speed up responses to new business conditions
- Increase the reach of learning solutions
- Increase the ongoing sharing of best practices

## Training from Any Location

Organizations no longer need a dedicated office, classroom, or conference room with dedicated equipment to train employees. And workers don't necessarily have to be physically in an office to participate in training, thanks to elearning and mobile learning.

Employees can connect to content anywhere Internet service is available, including while traveling, at home, or during the daily commute. This allows users access to training on their time, and on devices that are readily accessible.

## Flexible Scheduling

Mobile learning lets employees set their own training schedules. Because content can be accessed at virtually any time and anywhere, learning can happen more frequently, for example, during pauses at work, on personal time, as part of formal instruction, or as supplemental help for tasks on an as-needed basis.

## Productivity, Engagement, and the Bottom Line

Mobile learning brings proven results. When compared to non-mobile users, mobile users achieve a 70 percent improvement in productivity and a 47 percent improvement in manager perception of the business benefit, according to the study by Towards Maturity. In addition, revenue improved by 25 percent, and significant gains in training engagement were identified (Towards Maturity).

The same study in 2014 found continued benefits resulting from the use of mobile learning, including:

- 43 percent productivity improvement
- 73 percent revenue improvement
- 44 percent time-to-competency improvement
- A 75 percent improvement in positive staff engagement (Towards Maturity).

Research also shows that mobile learning results in better retention than more traditional training models. For example, one global pharmaceutical company achieved a 53 percent improvement in knowledge retention among staff members by using mobile learning while introducing a new product (Werner & da Gama).

## MEASURING ELEARNING SUCCESS

Elearning can be a valuable tool to drive an organization toward measurable results, so it is important to measure the effects of elearning. Positive metrics can justify the cost of elearning and position a learning and development program to resist budget cuts.

Research shows that many organizations don't know where to start when it comes to elearning reporting and metrics. According to *Getting Started in eLearning: Measuring Success*, 10 percent of organizations didn't measure learning at all, and nearly 90 percent only measured user completion of course work (eLearning Guild).

Josh Bersin, founder of Bersin by Deloitte, has identified important elearning measurements that include:

- Enrollments. Is the intended audience enrolling? How long is it taking them to enroll after assignment?
- Activity. Have learners started the course, and how far did they get?
- Completion. What are the percentages?
- Scores. How well did learners do? Did they learn the content? (LiNe Zine)

The following measurements are based on the classic Kirkpatrick model of evaluating learning, which has been used as a benchmark for learning assessment. The following are now the de facto standard for determining whether learning has occurred, and whether that learning is being applied on the job, where applicable.

| Levels  | Steps    | Follow-Up  |
|---------|----------|--|
| Level 1 | Reaction | How do learners feel?  |
| Level 2 | Learning | What did they learn?   |
| Level 3 | Behavior | Are they transferring the learning to their jobs?  |
| Level 4 | Results  | Do behaviors indicate that they will have a positive impact on desired results? How much does the training affect the company's bottom line? |

Sources: Kirkpatrick; Aura Interactiva

Level 3 and Level 4 are critical to measuring the success of elearning initiatives past simply completing a course.

Level 3 is measuring a behavior change as a result of the training. According to Aura Interactiva, common ways to assess behavior change and knowledge transfers are observation surveys or surveys of the learner, a supervisor, or customers conducted a few months after training. The bottom line is to measure behavioral changes that result directly from elearning.

Ideally, success measurements are established before training is implemented. Metrics that the organization is already gathering—that support the need for training—should be collected before and after training to assess the impact of training. However, Level 4 can be harder to measure at the corporate level due to varied organizational values and goals. Some variables can be measured based on cultural values or business focus. These are considered “bottom line” factors, or outcomes that could bring changes in either financial or operational outcomes (Kumar).

These “bottom line” factors come from understanding what the end goals of elearning are. To identify these, Dashe & Thomson suggests the following:

1. Define success. The value of elearning comes from what an organization does with it. Concrete end goals are needed to measure that value.
2. Identify soft savings the company expects to realize. “Elearning often provides improvements for employees in terms of shorter training-times, improved training-retention, consistency of training, and increased employee satisfaction. Identifying these and other possible benefits, and setting values to them, will allow you to better gauge how your course is stacking up.” (Dashe & Thomson).

A final step, or Level 5 not included in Kirkpatrick’s model, uses preceding levels, particularly Level 4, to measure ROI.

“Quantitative information gives you real ROI measurement. If you can hold a target group constant, you can often see real improvements in business metrics after rolling out an elearning program. You can correlate this information to the elearning program by looking at the timing of the rollout, timing of completion, and the business change during that period.”

- Josh Bersin (LiNe Zine)

It is important to note that corporations aren’t only looking for ROI, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to measuring the value of elearning.

According to the study *Measuring Knowledge Investment*, organizations evaluate how well learning has aligned with business objectives fairly equally across four methods: ROI, new thinking patterns and methods, leadership, and motivation and innovation (Corporate Learning Network).

## CORPORATE ELEARNING AND THE LYNDA.COM SOLUTION

Online learning company lynda.com uses elearning best practices, including the power of visual engagement, to help businesses and nonprofit organizations meet learning and development needs. Covering thousands of software, creative, and business skills, lynda.com online video tutorials align with how people process information. Courses are available on-demand 24/7—on desktop computers or on mobile devices to support a dispersed workforce, remote workers, and employees who are commuting or traveling. lynda.com serves more than half of the Fortune 50 companies, seven of the top 10 advertising agencies, 16 of the top 20 media companies, and other organizations of all sizes.

lynda.com can be used as a turnkey training solution or to supplement classroom-based instruction. It helps close skill gaps, streamline onboarding, and provide employees with just-in-time answers that support the daily workflow.

lynda.com also helps organizations develop top talent. It offers training on employee leadership skills that support succession planning.

## FEATURES OF THE LYNDA.COM SOLUTION

The lynda.com platform allows organizations, teams, or individuals to access all content, create course playlists, and track learning and development.

For organizations with an LMS, lynda.com can integrate seamlessly via AICC integration. This allows a client organization’s workforce to train from a centralized resource hub, rather than from different platforms or multiple Internet-based sites.

Through an API, the cloud-based content, reporting capabilities, and administrative functions of lynda.com can be accessed from anywhere with an Internet connection. This allows maximum flexibility in learning, development, and training management.

## Enhanced Administrative Functionality and Reporting

Whether an organization integrates content with its own LMS or accesses tutorials directly on the website, lynda.com offers a wide range of beneficial features.

lynda.com courses can be viewed, shared, and assigned to individuals, teams, departments, or an entire company via customizable course playlists. Using playlists, administrators or team managers can emphasize portions of the lynda.com library to promote specific competencies or learning goals at a variety of skill levels. They also can use playlists to promote specific initiatives, to onboard new employees, or to “level” an identified skills gap.

lynda.com has robust reporting capabilities that can easily integrate with other enterprise systems via APIs. Administrative reports measure numerous aspects of engagement by learners, including:

- Time spent on lynda.com by users, teams, or an entire organization
- Courses viewed and completed by users, teams, or an entire organization
- Courses with the most views
- Achievement

### **lynda.com Mobile**

Whether integrated into an existing LMS or accessed directly on the lynda.com website, all courses are accessible on mobile devices via a downloadable application. Mobile access is available for Apple® iPhone® and iPad® devices as well as for devices built on the Android™ and Microsoft® Windows® platforms.

## **CONCLUSION**

As organizations seek to capitalize on the benefits of elearning, they should pay close attention to elearning needs, training content, technology options, and reporting capabilities.

Through its robust platform and LMS compatibility, lynda.com is a comprehensive learning and development resource that brings value to businesses and nonprofit organizations.

In addition, lynda.com meets reporting and measurement needs. Its detailed reports can help any organization assess the ROI of its elearning initiatives.

For more information on lynda.com business solutions, contact [sales@lynda.com](mailto:sales@lynda.com).

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