Future-proof your corporate learning strategy:

4 simple steps to cut through the clutter

Information overload

Learning and Development (L&D) leaders are all too aware of the challenges facing corporate trainers today: shrinking budgets, a dispersed and mobile workforce, evolving business demands, and shifting employee expectations.

Equally daunting is the abundance of information on how to address these challenges, including scientific research on learning, new teaching methodologies, and a seemingly endless supply of technology solutions. Rather than empowering leaders, it can lead to information overload.

Employees suffer the same fate. While ubiquitous access to the information they need to perform their jobs delivers clear benefits, it also has its downsides: distraction, poor time management, and burnout. It's therefore imperative that L&D leaders cut through the clutter today to assess the best path forward.

This guide can help. We've curated the essential insights you need to develop a roadmap for success, so you can emerge with clear criteria for finding the right partner to help future-proof your corporate learning strategy.

The price of indecision

Higher turnover

2 years
is the average tenure of today's millennial workers

Increased hiring expenses

$4,129
is the average cost per hire for companies*

Retraining costs

58%

58%
of organizations **spend more than $1,000 per learner** on training

Disruption

84%

84%
of organizations will face workforce disruption in the next five years

1

Training is a matchmaking process—it requires developing employees in a way that satisfies their needs while furthering the company's objectives.

Assess what professional development means to your employees

It's not enough for today's workers to be complimented for "a job well done." They also crave continuous personal and professional development. In fact, they see the two as intertwined.

Companies that don't offer clear learning opportunities risk higher-than-average employee attrition rates. Workers know that to stay relevant in a technologically fluid marketplace, they'll need to reinvent themselves constantly and will look to their employers to help them do so.

It's important that L&D leaders regularly take the pulse of the forces driving employees' job satisfaction and align them with solutions that further their companies' objectives.

Take action

Identify the skills gaps:

- Do recent graduates entering the workforce possess the skills needed to effectively contribute and succeed at your company?
- Poll supervisors for insights, and jointly develop skill assessments.

Survey workers:

- Does the current development program meet their needs?
- What changes would they like to see?
- Where do they turn to find the information they need to do their jobs better?
- How do they perceive learning opportunities from their supervisors? From their peers?

Assess current and projected turnover:

- What is the average tenure of your workforce?
- Do certain departments have higher attrition than others?
- Do you anticipate a wave of future openings due to retirements? If so, how will you manage critical knowledge transfer to new employees?
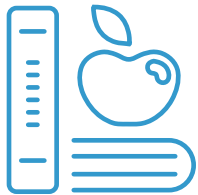
2

Focus on core competencies

Competency-based education (CBE) has gained traction in colleges and universities over the past decade, but how does it apply to corporate learning environments?

Simply put, CBE is a win-win for both the employee and the organization. It enables workers to progress through training at their own pace while empowering the company to accurately assess mastery and establish quantifiable benchmarks. It offers the personalization that today's workers demand, along with the scalability that businesses need.

What is a core competency?

" *A cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects a major part of one's job, that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development.*"

S. B. Parry,
The Quest for Competencies

Hallmarks of a CBE program include:

- Learners can access learning regardless of time, pace, or place
- Performance expectations are known from the beginning
- Time can vary, but learning is held constant
- Learners do not need to engage with content if they can demonstrate proficiency
- Dashboards and visualization tools allow learners to track their progress

And the benefits to companies are clear:

- Decreases time to completion
- Increases relevance
- Increases trainee proficiency
- Saves on travel expenses by shifting to online/hybrid delivery
- Reduces productivity loss due to employee absence
- Frees up time for trainers to coach and mentor

Take action

Define the training outcomes:

Work with functional leaders to determine what learners need to know, think, or be able to do as a result of the learning unit.

Identify gaps:

Assess how your current program supports the desired outcomes, and identify any gaps.

Define assessments to measure core competencies:

Use assessment results to evaluate trainee performance, as well as to identify strengths and areas for growth.

Choose a solutions partner:

Identify a partner that possesses both the technological platform to support CBE and the depth of expertise in the field of L&D.

Establish benchmarks:

Use aggregate assessment results to diagnose opportunities for program improvement.

Wisdom from the trenches

> ❝ *Incorporate peer-to-peer collaboration.* ❞

Collaboration doesn't need to be en masse or in real time. By encouraging employees to help each other—which could just as easily be via instant message in a collaboration tool as it can be sitting next to someone—you're also making each of them think about what they're learning.

> ❝ *Snack on information rather than indulge.* ❞

That snack could be watching a three-minute video, reading a short article, checking details of coursework, or even taking a test. If your course doesn't work properly on a mobile device, you're blocking this preferred way of learning.

It's obvious but true: if it isn't clear to someone why they're being asked to complete a piece of learning, they won't engage with it. Saying "because you have to, it's for compliance" isn't enough. Somewhere, there's a reason why your employees are being asked to take this course. Share it with them.

> ❝ *Put yourself in the employee's shoes.* ❞

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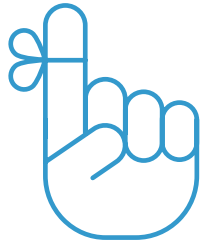
The forgetting curve

The forgetting curve hypothesizes the decline of memory retention in time, suggesting that if newly acquired knowledge isn't reinforced within a matter of days, the likelihood of retaining it is dramatically impacted.

# Create engaging experiences. And beat the forgetting curve.

Now that you have a sense for the core competencies you'd like to develop, it's time to think about how to produce them. For today's connected learners, it's all about personalization—tailoring experiences to their unique interests and needs. This is where learning science intersects with today's technology.

With legions of digital corporate content solutions available, it can be tempting to go "all in" with an exclusively online solution. But studies show that a blended approach to learning is more successful, offering a well-rounded program that includes online, mobile, and in-person training. Be sure to create "engaging experiences" that span all forms of learning delivery.

What is microlearning?

" *Microlearning is a way of teaching and delivering content to learners in small, very specific bursts. The learners are in control of what and when they're learning.* "

elearningindustry.com
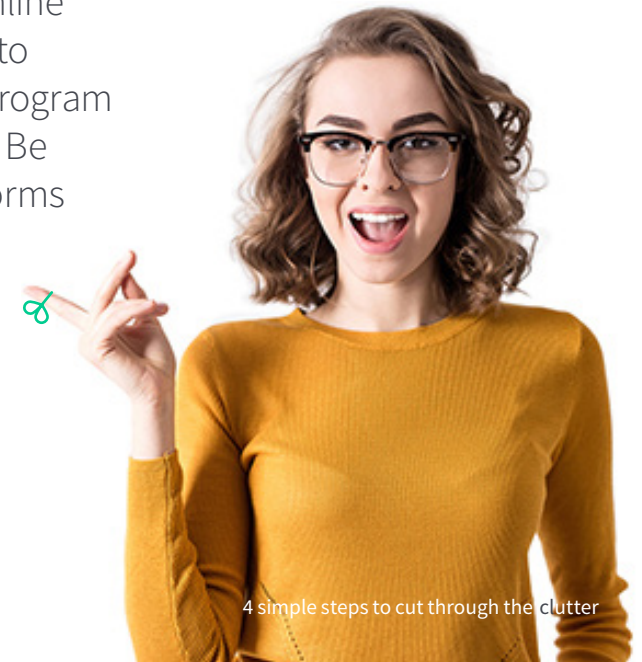
A return to corporate universities

Increasingly, companies are formalizing a hybrid approach to learning and development. They focus on a strategic plan for contextual learning that furthers the company's mission:

Which pieces of information are more appropriate for an online training program?

Which training activities benefit best from interpersonal interaction and demonstration?

The answers to these questions are used to structure the virtual and physical composition of the company's "university."

Take action

Design content that can be immediately applied:

Timing is the key to retention. Ensure learners have an opportunity to apply learnings right away.

Use real-world scenarios to allow people to practice what they learn:

Especially for areas where the company has experienced consistent errors or issues, provide training exercises that offer an opportunity for participants to "learn from their mistakes" during training—instead of making them on the job.

Leverage peer-to-peer learning using online collaboration:

Tap into your own network of experts by connecting mentors with more junior employees online, regardless of where they're based.

Incorporate multimedia elements (such as video and gamification):

For example, a public-speaking course may require participants to record themselves giving a speech as a creative way to demonstrate mastery.

4

Choose a partner—not a piece of technology

Organizations need a framework for success; not a set of disconnected widgets. L&D leaders shouldn't be bogged down with connecting the technology dots—"this system" for content, "that system" for delivery. Rather, they should be free to focus on the information and skills required for employees to succeed, and let their partner do the heavy lifting.

Consider these selection criteria when evaluating prospective partners:

✓ Possesses a deep understanding of the needs of both learners and instructors

✓ Is well-versed on pedagogy and new learning strategies

✓ Offers a customizable platform that can be tailored to your needs

✓ Demonstrates a strong commitment to customer satisfaction

✓ Is organizationally aligned to promote your success (such as offering a formalized cohort program and a dedicated client support division)

✓ Provides a wealth of resources (annual and community training events, best practices, etc.)

✓ Is familiar to your workers (e.g., Blackboard's entrenched experience within the university sector means that your employees likely already have experience using our solutions)

Choose a scalable, enterprise-grade technology platform that:

- ensures consistency of message, permitting course material to be updated from a central control point.

- provides ease of access, allowing participants to connect with course material and fellow learners from anywhere with an internet connection.

- integrates training tools into a single portal that can be configured and managed by each division in your organization.

- provides a blended learning experience, incorporating experiential practice, group collaboration, learner preparation, and instructor guidance and feedback.

- includes the ability to schedule and manage courses, classroom time, and webinars outside the learning management system (LMS).

- ensures the organization's ability to control enrollments.

- tracks learner progress.

- improves the reporting process.
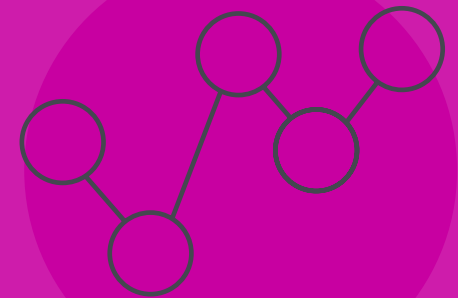
Take action

Leverage the partner and technology selection criteria shared in this e-book to assess prospective vendors.

Conduct your own research to look beyond the marketing headlines and reveal true past performance—case studies, client lists, and available resources that reveal a depth of knowledge (or perhaps lack thereof).

Summary

Weeding through an ocean of information about the latest corporate-learning trends and technologies can steal valuable time away from L&D leaders pursuing their core mission, and may lead to decision paralysis.

Given that the risk of indecision is high—escalating employee attrition and opportunity cost in the form of reduced employee productivity—it's imperative that organizations cut through the clutter and chart a clear path forward today.

Four simple steps to structuring a framework for success and future-proofing your corporate learning strategy:

1

Make professional development job one

Workers value continuous learning and professional growth. Centering a training program on this north star will not only benefit the business by increasing productivity, but will also likely result in reducing turnover.

2

Focus on core competencies

Deconstructing existing training content and reconstructing it as core competencies can empower organizations to employ the mutually beneficial approach of competency-based education.

3

Create engaging experiences

Develop a comprehensive program that includes a mix of multimedia, microlearning, and in-person activities. E-learning solutions should serve as complements to—not replacements of—in-person engagement activities.

4

Choose a partner—not a piece of technology

When evaluating solutions, consider the benefit of leveraging a partner that not only offers leading-edge technology, but also understands the intricacies of learning and your industry.
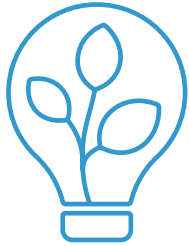
A successful corporate learning strategy must not only address today's needs but also scale for those of tomorrow.

Working with an experienced partner who offers a comprehensive solution, understands the business of learning, and demonstrates a commitment to customer service frees up L&D leaders to focus on their core mission: training and retaining a productive workforce.

Blackboard can help

The task of assessing your corporate L&D program and strategizing the next steps to take it into the new millennium can be overwhelming. But with the right partner, it doesn't have to be.

For more than 20 years, Blackboard has pioneered the way learning is delivered, from K-12 to higher education to the business world. We have set the standard by which 100 million individuals learn today—including those students who will likely become your prospective applicants tomorrow.

Blackboard understands the unique training needs of businesses, supporting more than 1,600 corporate, healthcare, and government clients and 10 million employees worldwide. We can help you bridge any gaps in design and development, and enable you to deliver effective content that will have a direct impact on your organization.

Learn more: Blackboard.com/business

Additional resources:

Successful corporate learning starts with impact on business [e-book]

The effects of corporate learning on employee recruitment and retention [e-book]

Training technology: learn, grow or become obsolete [webinar]

20 essential questions to drive organizational learning [e-book]

6 golden rules to training employees [whitepaper]