

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER



Ara Ohanian explains how closer ties between management, operations and training make for higher impact learning, faster.

Today, an enterprise's people have never been more important to its success, something that executives and managers increasingly understand. They are looking to their Learning and Development (L&D) departments for help, asking them to take a lead in ensuring relevant competence and knowledge throughout the enterprise and beyond.

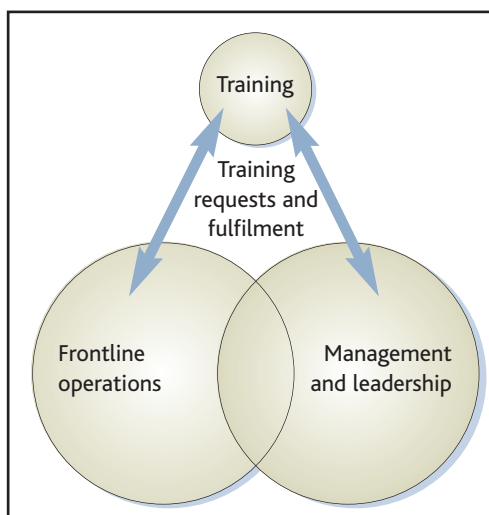
In the past, the learning and development profession has seen fads focused on both technologies and on methodologies. However, technologies and methods are only individual components of a broader approach to organisational learning, an approach which some companies are already deploying to great effect.

In these organisations, frontline operations are supported by both management focus and by training delivery. The result: a new approach to organisational learning, with L&D directly serving key operations to deliver impact at the front line of the enterprise, and beyond.

This approach is called 'integrated learning'.

BEYOND BLENDED LEARNING

Traditionally, the training department was a service provider to the rest of the organisation. Largely, it was only concerned with providing courses at the request of HR and of management. Its focus, therefore, was on internal efficiency – in particular, on making classroom delivery as efficient as possible.



Many organisations still train this way, but this isolated form of training delivery, slow to respond to business need, no longer provides training that is rapid or focused enough for today's world.

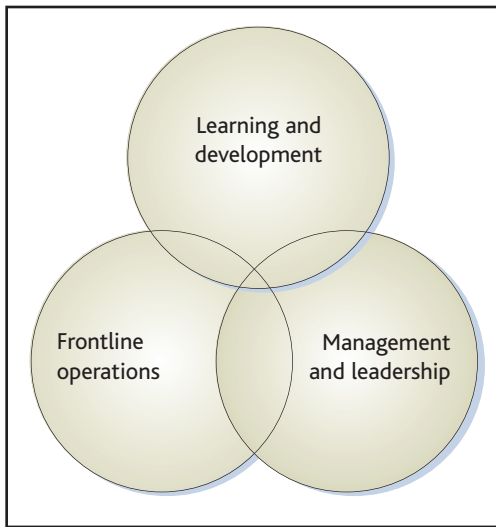
In time, as the training department changed into the learning and development (L&D) department, it became clear that L&D was about more than simply delivering training, and that learning could occur outside the classroom.

The result was 'blended learning'. At first nothing more than a classroom course with the addition of a book or some online reading materials, blended learning has rapidly become the standard delivery mechanism for learning materials in most organisations. It remains, however, just that: a delivery mechanism, not an integral part of the organisation.

Today, this style of blended learning is no longer enough, not by itself. It focuses on delivery rather than on results, and on materials, not

performance. But the successful L&D department of today is not a separate body from the rest of the organisation, like the traditional training department. It works closely with other departments. In particular it has close links with front line operational departments such as Sales and Production, where enhanced performance has a direct effect on organisational effectiveness. It also works closely with leadership to meet organisational goals.

Going beyond blended learning takes the L&D department into integrated learning.



INTEGRATED LEARNING

Integrated learning helps organisations remain effective by putting the knowledge of the organisation to work faster than traditional classroom training, and by ensuring at the same time that the skills and knowledge delivered are entirely relevant to organisational goals.

Integrated learning, therefore, both includes the blended learning approach to delivery and goes beyond it, incorporating organisational goals as a key driver to its activity.

In an integrated approach to learning, each area concentrates on its own core role and the L&D department supports the other departments as appropriate, see example on the right.

While blended learning focuses on the delivery mechanism of training, integrated learning focuses on the performance results of the organisation. The top priority is improving the effectiveness of those in frontline operations, the

people who have the most effect on organisational success.

Although a systematic integration of corporate goals into learning is core to integrated learning, this does not mean that an integrated approach requires massive investment in systems. Some technology is required, but it is as important to invest in understanding the needs of the rest of the organisation, and working with it.

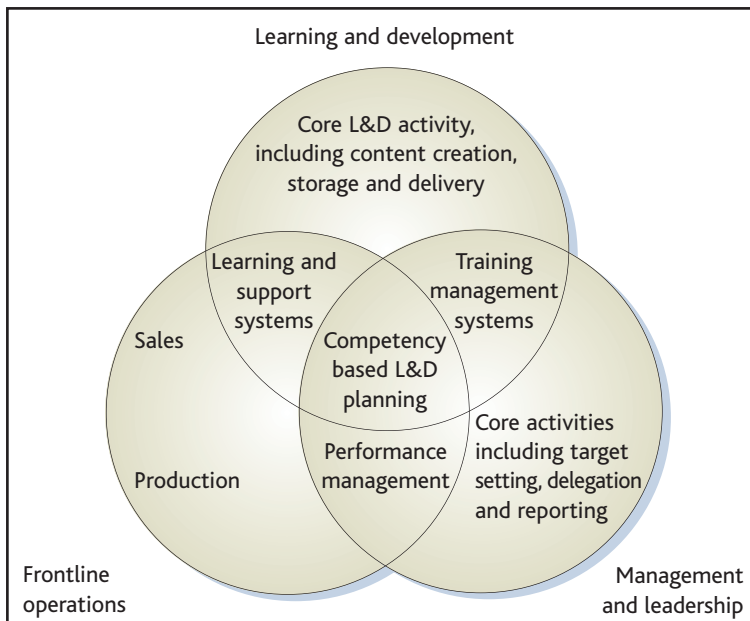
The key factor behind successful integrated learning is the attitude of the L&D department. It has to be a department that steps outside its own domain. Integrated learning begins with conversations with the other departments (sales, operations, production, marketing, etc.) that make up the organisation, and which make it a success.

INTEGRATING LEARNING IN YOUR ORGANISATION

Integrated learning involves taking learning from the province of L&D out into other departments. The result is pervasive learning throughout an enterprise. But it is only possible for L&D to do this effectively by focusing on what unites it with these other departments: the goals of the organisation, and achieving them as rapidly as possible.

Integrated learning rests on four crucial pillars:

1. Focus on results and speed
2. Integrate with management
3. Integrate with learners
4. Support by technology



1. Focus on results and speed

The front line operations in your organisation have targets to meet and will work closely with any L&D initiative that helps them achieve those targets rapidly.

For example, the rental company Aaron's Rents wanted to maintain and improve sales across 1,500 outlets in the US. Part of their approach to this was to implement a new sales staff training programme. Once this route had been identified, each day of delay before well-trained staff stepped onto the shop floor was a day of potentially lower sales revenue. Aaron's opted to deliver the training through a rapidly-deployed, integrated Learning Management System that included LMS, LCMS and web 2.0 collaboration. The result: the L&D department working with operations and sales to design, deploy and implement the LMS in just three weeks. That's a focus on results at work!

2. Integrate with management

In the past, the training department was able to work to its own schedule, producing courses for the organisation to consume, knowing that the content would match the largely unchanged needs of the business.

With today's rapid rate of change, this method is inadequate. Instead, L&D has to work closely with organisational management and leadership to ensure not only that the right content is developed, but also that it is deployed in ways that meet the sometimes conflicting needs of the organisation – with the conflict usually between a need for skills on the job, and time taken off to learn them.

Understanding organisational goals and meeting them quickly is one area in which it is crucial to integrate with management. Another is working intelligently with existing management procedures and information. For example, the executive may have called in external specialists to build a competency framework for the organisation.

It might be tempting to try to incorporate the entire framework into L&D operations, to provide a complete mapping of courses to the competencies identified as organisationally essential. It would be



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tempting, but not the best use of valuable time.

This is a process that could take months. Instead, work with management to understand where the introduction of competencies into L&D could have the greatest effect. Probably the core 20% of competencies, applied to L&D for the essential 20% of frontline personnel will make a substantial difference to frontline results.

3. Integrate with learners

There are two essential ways to integrate L&D with learners. The first is to encourage their contribution. Adding learner input not only boosts the content available in a system, it also increases learning through stronger engagement.

Collaborative technologies such as blogs, wikis, Microsoft SharePoint, and online meetings are now part of many people's working lives, and they expect to be able to use them in e-learning.

However, remember the need to focus on speed and results. Any time spent integrating this technology with other systems is time not spent delivering results. Instead, look for learning platform technologies that already incorporate collaborative functionality and are pre-configured to integrate with other tools. This means you don't have to pay for integration. More importantly, though, it means you can keep focused on results.

A larger, crucial part of integration with learners is your adoption plan. When introducing any learning to an organisation, include these points in your plan to ensure that your learners are on board:

- understand your audience
- build 'champion' groups
- go for quick wins
- get expert help and funding
- build credibility and kudos internally
- get external recognition
- maintain the motivation

4. Support by technology

None of the above is possible without technology - but what technology? As seen above, the need to focus on speed and results means that whatever technology is deployed, it must:

- be quick to deploy
- be fairly priced
- be manageable by the L&D department, not by external consultants
- include the functionality you need, not the bells and whistles you don't
- include training tailored to the functionality that will be used
- incorporate collaborative learning tools
- integrate with third party learning tools

With good technology support, it is possible to make the transition from the traditional training department to integrated learning.

Given that most organisations already have some learning systems in place, how does this help or hinder them in moving to integrated learning?

Many L&D departments work with home-grown systems, combinations of tools and

content brought together over time. Such organisations will want to consider replacing these time-consuming combinations of tools with an all-in-one system that includes the LMS and LCMS functionality that they need to move to integrated learning. The system must be able to import existing learner data and course content.

Organisations that already have an LMS in place have until recently faced a similar choice: to strip out the LMS and replace it with a more comprehensive solution, or to try to make it work in conjunction with a variety of content management tools.

An alternative solution exists, however: integration with a single tool which combines LMS capability with a Learning Content Management System (LCMS).

Working together with other departments will lead, eventually, to demands for other forms of integration. Any learning system must also be able to work with your existing legacy HR and ERP software, because sooner or later you may be asked to establish a link between the two.

Nobody wants two systems carrying personnel data, and a system that is open to integration with, for example, SAP and Oracle/PeopleSoft will enable you to save your own time and to leverage the investment your organisation has already made.

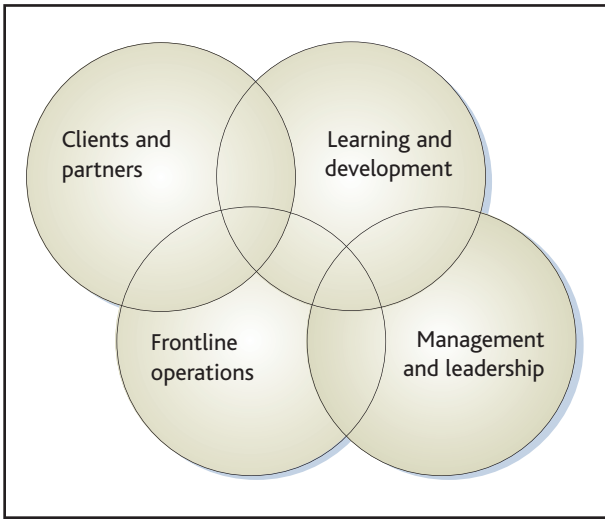
LEARNING BEYOND THE ENTERPRISE

Companies such as Black & Decker have extended their L&D operations beyond their own organisations and included partners in the extended enterprise. This is in keeping with the web 2.0 world, where people expect openness and transparency, and easily accessible information.

Innovative organisations are now going further, using their LMS to open up their learning not only to partners, but also to clients. This is using L&D not merely to support the frontline, but to extend it.

Giving clients direct access to quality learning about products and services not only reduces support and maintenance calls, it enhances customer loyalty and sets competitors a barrier to entry.

This approach of extending learning to clients as well as its partners leads to a larger view of integrated learning:



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CONCLUSION

Integrated learning is essential to meeting the needs of modern organisations in both the public and private sectors.

Integrated learning has three hallmarks. Learning and development, although still controlled centrally by the L&D department, is integrated into the operations of the business. This results in the second characteristic: a management-driven focus on speed and on results, on practical business results achieved in unison,

rather than over-engineered systematic learning perfection produced in isolation.

Such close integration demands the third characteristic: integrated technological support, particularly of learning content. To be truly focused on speed, the L&D department cannot spend its time on implementation, administration and tinkering with technical maintenance of several different systems.

Only with the right technical support can an organisation truly benefit from integrated learning.

Ara Ohanian is CEO of CERTPOINT Systems. This is an extract from the CERTPOINT white paper on Integrated Learning, one of a series of papers available at <http://bit.ly/CPNTWhitePapers>