



Learning Technology Strategy

Aligning with how we think, work, and learn

A Quinnoation White Paper

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Executive Summary

As the pace of change move faster, companies are recognizing that they need to become more agile. Unfortunately, the tried and tested approaches to organizational innovation are contrary to traditional business practices. In this new era, companies need to start leveraging the power of technology in ways that align with how we think, work, and learn. And there's a critical role for Learning & Development (L&D) that sadly isn't being seen.

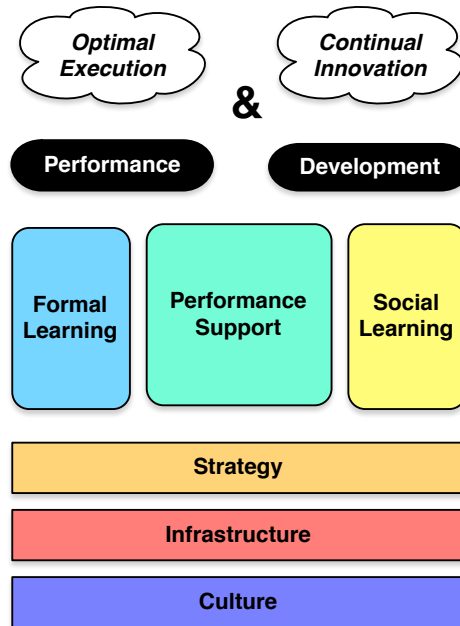
Organizations are latching onto social business, using social media as a tool to facilitate communication. And while the intent is correct, the execution is complex and easy to get wrong. The components are more than just installing a social network; there are skills to develop and a culture to build. And just as with courses, social networks are only one part of the bigger picture.

The goal is a full performance ecosystem, an integrated technology environment that provides the tools for employees to execute against the known elements and similarly be prepared to innovate as needed. These solutions are already emerging, driven by need and largely independent of L&D. As a consequence, a critical opportunity for L&D is being missed. The time is *now* for L&D to step up.

The Current Context

Organizations are facing increasing change. More information is available, both internally and externally. Competition is moving faster, through the use of mathematical modeling and 3D printing. And the regulatory environment is changing faster as well. Organizations now need to be agile, finding ways to adapt effectively as well as efficiently. Optimal execution is just the cost of entry, while continual innovation is the only sustainable differentiator.

The techniques used in these two areas are different. Optimal execution is about anticipating what needs to be done and preparing ahead of time to deliver. It's very much about learning ahead of time. Innovation, too, is a form of learning, but in the moment. When you're designing, trouble-shooting, creating, problem-solving, researching, and more, you don't know the answer when you begin, but you will discover the answer along the way.



The critical revelation is that there is a role for support in both forms of learning. Assuming people are capable of collaborating effectively is as much a mistake as assuming that everyone is prepared to do their job from the outset. And what’s currently happening is that, in lieu of L&D stepping up to support the innovation, other business units are taking this role on, but without the real knowledge of how to support the necessary activities.

To be fair, L&D isn’t typically doing well in the tasks it *is* executing, either. The Association for Talent Development (then the American Society for Training & Development) in 2012 reported “Less than half of organizations have learning functions that excel at accomplishing the very things they exist to do.”¹ This is the unit that is supposed to be responsible for organizational execution!

The problem is that much of L&D is being run on industrial era models, while most of business has joined the information age. Courses are seen as *the* answer, when in fact there’s *much* more to be done to support execution, let alone facilitate innovation. For just one example, in this era of digital workplaces, only 19% of L&D budgets go to technology!² There is a clear lack of perspective and focus in taking the workplace forward.

And a Learning Management System (LMS) is not a Learning Technology Strategy. While managing courses is one component of a strategy, it is not the full picture. Using technology in ways that support improving performance both in the moment *and* over time is one missed opportunity. A second gap is in tapping into the power of people. The recognition that the room is smarter than the smartest person in the room (if you manage the process right) seems to have missed L&D.

¹ *Developing Results: Aligning Learning’s Goals and Outcomes With Business Performance Measures Report 2012*

² *Embracing Change: Improving Performance of Business, Individuals, and the L&D Team. Towards Maturity 2015-2016 Industry Benchmark Report.*

In short, L&D isn't doing near what it could and should, and what it *is* doing it is doing badly. What it is delivering, face-to-face and online, doesn't reflect what is known about how we learn. Further, the lack of support in the moment does not reflect what we know about how people think. Finally, the lack of emphasis on effective communication and collaboration shows that L&D is also insufficient in taking advantage of how people really work.

The alternative viewpoint, the picture that could be seen, is one of a vibrant *performance ecosystem*, where technology is strategically used to facilitate all the components of successful organizational activity. A functioning ecosystem is a workplace environment where:

- Effective learning experiences are delivered
- Tools are available for those areas where our brains *don't* cope well
- Resources are available to support self-learning
- Self-learning skills are nurtured
- Working together is encouraged through collaborative tools
- Interactions are facilitated to achieve optimal outcomes
- The skills to work together are developed
- Interventions are tied to specific business outcomes

This is the opportunity for L&D. It is a superset of what L&D currently does, but it's the needed activity to optimize organizational outcomes in effectively working and learning. It's what L&D could, and should, be doing.

Practices

So how, concretely, should one proceed? On principle, the general steps are to assess current status, envision a desired goal, identify steps along the way, prioritize those steps, and then monitor progress. There are plenty of details around governance, metrics, and more.

In practice, it's about being systematic in process and thorough in coverage. Ensuring the broad perspective is a challenge, as the potential solution space covers a broad swath of technologies and associated practices that are unlikely to be familiar. Being drawn back into the familiar is a common trap for many organizations.

In one instance, Quinnovation was brought in to work with an organization looking to take a 'customer experience' approach to their interactions with purchasers of their equipment. This was a broad approach, but the specific engagement was with the training group. Quinnovation helped them see that their training, from the customer view, was inextricably linked with their documents and service offerings. As a consequence, the links between the groups were strengthened and the suite of offerings was enriched.

In this customer experience engagement and several others, Quinnovation has helped clients understand that from a performance perspective, there are many other components to consider *beyond* training. Customers are looking for solutions, and are quite happy to have performance support and community help. Job aids and 'how to' videos are can be preferred to courses as solutions! Similarly, connecting with someone who has already developed a solution can be more valuable than trying to find the solution from a crowded site of resources. Getting solutions

to customer problems quicker is a valuable proposition, and links to a community create a tighter relationship with customers.

The same perspective works internally as well. Employees, just as with customers, prefer having the right solution to hand as opposed to having been prepared but having forgotten what was in the course. Similarly, there are times when getting the solution from the network or curated resources makes more sense than developing a solution, particularly in these changing times.

What makes sense for one organization as a path, however, isn't necessarily what makes sense for other organizations. In the eLearning strategy workshops Quinnovation has run at conferences, attendees end up finding different areas to focus on. After the first such workshop in 2009, the first three attendees called upon each reported that their efforts would come from completely different areas: one was going to focus on deeper learning design, a second on performance support, and the third was going to prioritize communities!

These areas are robustly co-dependent, so a focus on one can naturally end up involving other areas. A not-for-profit that brought Quinnovation in to assist with a mobile strategy ended up realizing that their first priority was a social media effort! Similarly, an eLearning strategy effort ended up incorporating a focus on performance support.

The New Vision

It's well past time to be looking at eLearning strategically. The digitization of business cannot be ignored by L&D, and what has to occur is to look at the overall picture of how people perform. The elements of how people think, work, *and* learn has opportunities to be facilitated, and technology has a role to play.

New frameworks, including "working and learning out loud", 70:20:10, Modern Workplace Learning, and more, are helping establish the new ways of working. New approaches including meaningful work, making it safe to share, and time for reflection, are providing demonstrable returns. The old ways no longer cut it, and it's past time for L&D to take the steps necessary to assist the organization. Organizations moving in this direction outperform their peers.

The only way to get it right, however, is to understand all the components, create an ultimate vision, and then start working towards it. This includes assessing the current status of the organization in light of *all* the possibilities, educating the stakeholders on the opportunities, working together to prioritize steps, and then following through on the detailed elements that are required.

This should not be done haphazardly or piecemeal. A systematic and informed approach is the only way to cut away the distractions and drill into a full strategic exercise and accompanying execution plan. There is a bright future for L&D with the right approach, and it is time to take action.

About Quinnovation

Quinnovation works with organizations looking to take their use of eLearning to the *next level*, strategically using IT to deliver performance improvement results. Quinnovation combines a deep cognitive background, strong technology experience, and sound business understanding to deliver innovative thinking, with a track record of insightful strategic analysis and pragmatic and successful solutions. Clark Quinn of Quinnovation has quite literally written the book on L&D change: [*Revolutionize Learning & Development: Performance and Innovation Strategy for the Information Age*](#) (Wiley, 2014). Quinnovation services include design process review and strategy. Internationally recognized in scholarship, presentations, and work, Quinnovation has delivered cutting-edge designs for Fortune 500 companies, business, government, education, and not-for-profits.