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Build an Online Learning Strategy for Your Organization

Online learning has been top of mind for organizations of all types and sizes over the past year. Associations have been eager to find alternate ways to keep members connected and engaged, and organizations have needed **creative** solutions to upskill and train a dispersed network of customers, partners, and employees.

Yet as impactful as online learning can be for both your organization and its learners, driving **bold, broad** change requires **decisive, deliberate** action. There's no doubt that having the right technology plays a vital role in enabling digital transformations. There is, however, another piece of the puzzle that can be just as crucial in helping to drive sustainable change: strategy.

IN THIS GUIDE, WE'LL EXPLORE:

- Why your organization needs to have a solid strategy in place to help power a long-term transformation of learning

- What questions you need to answer to help set a strong foundation for your online training initiatives

- How to build, execute, and evaluate your organization's strategy for digital education

Why a Strategy Matters for Your Digital Transformation

Digital transformations—including adopting or enhancing online education and training—could play important roles in driving long-term growth in our post-pandemic world. Research from McKinsey & Company revealed that rates of digitization have accelerated significantly and on a global scale. The digitization of services and products has sped up by seven years, while the digitization of customer interactions has leapt ahead by three.[1]

Organizations are realizing how important it is that they act fast to digitize more of what they do. Although 11% of people McKinsey surveyed believed their economic model would remain viable through 2023, 21% said they needed to at least include more digital technologies and a whopping **64% said they needed to build new digital businesses altogether.**[2]

But as we said earlier, digital transformations aren't stories written only by technology. To drive lasting, long-term success, your digital transformation initiative needs to be aligned with and supported by a strong strategy.

The rest of this guide is devoted to helping you understand how to build yours.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
The reimagining of how, where, and when an organization uses technology to evolve business practices, stay ahead of consumer preferences, or adapt to changing market requirements to help drive long-term, sustainable growth.

1   https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever
2   Ibid.

Before You Build Out Your Strategy

There are two questions you should answer that can help arm you with important information and lay a solid foundation as you go forward. First, you want to understand the resources your organization already has at its disposal that will support you as you launch or enhance your digital learning offerings. Second, you want to understand who your key stakeholders are going to be throughout the process.

1. WHAT EXISTING RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE CAN YOU LEVERAGE?

This will be important, especially when you start to get into the details about your programs that are going to be designed, developed, and monitored. Depending on the size of your organization and its experience with online learning, you may already have a lot of what you need in-house. If not, you'll need to determine whether you want to grow your teams or augment your capabilities by working with partners. **Either way, getting a lay of the land upfront will make it easier to quickly fill in the gaps when you spot them.**

Consider tools your organization already uses, such as:

- Learning platforms and tools
- Enterprise systems, including a human resource information system (HRIS), association management software (AMS), or customer advocacy platform
- Mobile applications
- Collaboration and web-conferencing tools

When it comes to expertise, you can break this down into **subject-matter expertise** and **technical expertise.**

SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTISE	TECHNICAL EXPERTISE
These are the people you'll work with to create custom content, if you're going that route. • There may be people within your organization who are particularly knowledgeable about a topic, product, or service. • There could also be individuals outside the organization who are experts in their industry or in a given area. • You can also think about how you could tap into the knowledge your learners have. Are there members, customers, or employees you may be able to empower as content creators?	These are the people who can help you set up, run, and monitor your online learning programs. • Do you have experts ready to set up and administer your learning environment, including the learning management system (LMS) and any integrated technologies? • Do you have learning and development staff who can work with subject-matter experts to make sure courses are set up as effectively as possible? • Do you have an individual or team ready to collect, work with, and interpret learning data? • Do you have support and professional development structures in place, especially for your own staff?

2. WHO ARE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS?

It almost goes without saying that to both initiate a change and drive long-term success, you need to have the support of your organization's key stakeholders. Depending on your organization's type and size, these could include representatives from:

Executive leadership	IT and administration
Learning and development	Accounting and finance
Communications and marketing	Human resources or talent management
Member relations	Customer advocacy

It's important to make sure you involve the right professionals, both in terms of the total number and the interests they represent. If you involve too many people, you could add confusion and unnecessary hurdles. Too few and you might not get buy-in from the right groups. In one study, going from five stakeholders to six led to a roughly 20% drop in the likelihood of purchase.[3]

When you're determining who you want around your decision-making table, it can be helpful to put together profiles for individual or group stakeholders that cover roles, key drivers and needs, the values and expertise they bring to the table, and the questions they'll need answered.

Name(s)	
Role(s)	
Key Driver(s)	
What needs will they have?	
What values and expertise will they bring to the table?	
What questions will they expect to have answered?	
Notes	

3 https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/business/sales-solutions/global/en_US/c/pdfs/The-Challenger-Customer-vF.pdf

Before You Build Out Your Strategy

1. OUTLINE YOUR VISION

The first step is to understand—in essence—what's driving your organization to launch or enhance its online learning programs. This means understanding both your vision and your purpose.

When you're figuring out your vision, some of the questions you'll want to ask yourself include:

- What does the future of learning, continuing education, and training look like?

- What are your organization's mission and values, and how can learning help advance them?

- What are some of the challenges or opportunities that lie ahead for you?

- Who are the stakeholders you need to engage? What are they expecting?

- How does the vision for where you'd like to be compare with where you are right now?

Ultimately, your aim is to be able to articulate the principles, priorities, challenges, needs, and wants that are relevant for your organization—all of which will inform your holistic, long-term vision.

Complementing your vision is your purpose. While your vision tells people what your organization does or aspires to do, your purpose tells them why and can help keep stakeholders working together toward a common goal.

2. CREATE A PLAN

Once you know what you're working toward, you can develop a plan that will help you get there. Your first step is to understand what needs to be done. To this end, you want to take a lens to your organization's **practices, goals**, and **priorities**.

- **Practices:** What practices will your organization focus on? How challenging are they? Which are more important versus less important?

- **Goals:** Is your organization ready to implement its goals? If not, what's needed?

- **Priorities:** What are your priorities? What actions would you say are high urgency but less challenging? Which are neither challenging nor urgent? For which ones will you need additional information or resources?

Your organization also needs to consider how it will track and measure its progress by turning broad objectives into focused goals and **KPIs**:

- How could technology help you assess your achievements?

- What are the key metrics you want to focus on?

- Are there any specific benchmarks you need to consider?

And finally, your organization needs to grapple with what the road ahead will look like by articulating **key milestones** and the actions you need to take to realize your goals, purpose, and vision.

Together, each of these elements—from the vision all the way down to the actions—becomes the building blocks that help your organization articulate and ultimately deliver on its online learning strategy.

VISION **PURPOSE** **GOALS** **KPIs** **MILESTONES** **ACTIONS**
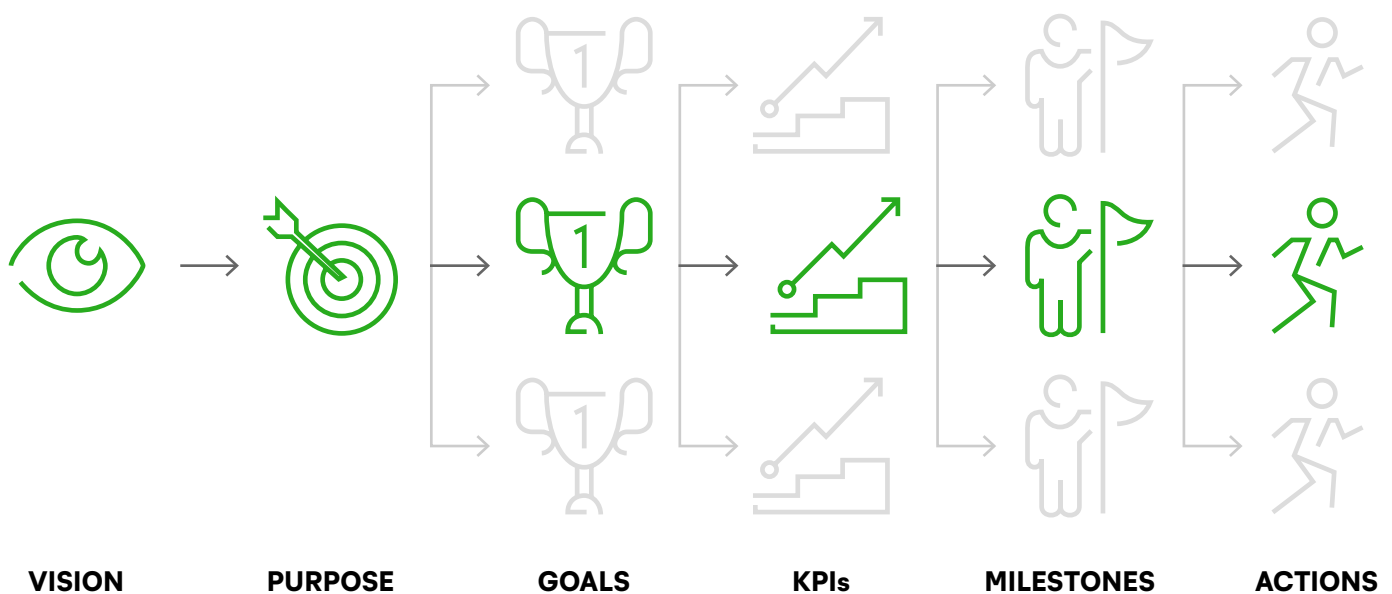
3. EXECUTE THE STRATEGY

Here, it's all about bringing your best-laid plans to life. Depending on the nature and type of initiatives you have planned, you could further break this down into **pilot** and **scale**.

During the piloting phase, your organization can test and refine proposed changes on a lower, smaller-stakes scale. This can give you information you need to more effectively grow programs. Some of the questions you'll want to answer include:

- What challenges, expected or unexpected, did your organization run into?

- What helped you achieve the successes you did?

- What adjustments did you have to make? Was there anything you had to sacrifice?

- What resources did you use? Were there any additional resources or supports that would have been helpful to have?

Be ready to document lessons learned and make alterations to the process. You may only need to do a pilot once if it goes smoothly, but be prepared to go through it again in case bigger concerns emerge or you need to reassess the impact of any modifications.

Once you understand what works and what you can expect to see, it's time to **scale the program** to your intended audiences or across the organization.

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3. EVALUATE THE IMPACT

and challenges of your organization. That's why it's so important to clearly articulate your goals early on. **If you know what you're aiming toward throughout, you'll be better able to pull the right proof points that will help you paint a more complete picture at the end.**

Data could come from a variety of sources, including:

- **The LMS itself,** which can give you valuable insights into trends with adoption, engagement, performance, and more

- **Enterprise-level systems like your HRIS,** AMS, or customer advocacy platform

- **Your stakeholders and learners,** through surveys and interviews conducted before, during, and after their experiences with the programs

- **External tools,** including relevant third-party content platforms or apps

Ultimately, you want to make sure that the online learning strategy you have in place will help you drive growth, that you have the tools to bring it to life, and that you can access data to show it's working.

Unlock the power of your data to become a world-class learning organization. **Download the Ultimate Guide to Learning Data and Analytics now.**

Work with Experts to Define and Deliver Your Online Learning Strategy

As your partner in learning, we're here to support you improve learning outcomes and achieve your strategic goals. Our Learning Strategists and Consultants have the expertise to help guide your vision, plan your approach, and execute your learning strategy.

VISION

Rely on our experience. Our work with our valued partners extends far beyond basic LMS consulting. We'll share extensive knowledge and proven best practices that fit with your specific goals.

PLAN

Align your approach. From first steps to the finish line, continuity is key. We'll support every interrelated part of the strategic change process to keep you moving in the right direction.

EXECUTE

Achieve your goals today—and into the future. We'll help you evaluate where you are today and define the strategic steps and benchmarks you'll need to move forward.

Learn more ›

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ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalized learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology products—D2L Brightspace and D2L Wave— enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world. Learn more at **D2L.com**.

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