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How to 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 few years. Businesses need creative solutions to upskill and train a dispersed network of 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 SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND FRAMEWORKS TO HELP YOU:

- set a strong foundation for your learning strategy

- develop a vision and purpose to guide it

- plan, implement and evaluate the impacts of your learning strategy

Why a Learning Strategy Matters

Creating a learning strategy can include a digital transformation when online education and training is involved. Digital transformations are playing increasingly important role in driving long-term growth. **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.

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.**

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.

Before You Build Out Your Strategy

There are three 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. Third, you want to identify what obstacles you may be up against and where your opportunities may be.

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), 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 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 experience platform (LXP) 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
Legal	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.

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.

Stakeholder Group	
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. WHERE COULD YOU ENCOUNTER OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES?

Getting an early lay of the land can play a crucial role in setting your business up for success. At which points might you face pushback? Where are your biggest knowledge and technology gaps? On the flipside of those coins, what parts of the project are your stakeholders most excited about, and where are your areas of strength?

OBSTACLES

Obstacle	Details	How can you overcome it?

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity	Details	How can you overcome it?

Plan, Execute and Evaluate

1. ARTICULATE YOUR VISION

Understanding your vision is about getting to the heart of what your organization is aiming to do. With the primary audience of an internal workforce, this could mean providing training opportunities that engage learners and drive business success.

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.

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2. OUTLINE YOUR PURPOSE

While your vision tells people what your organization aspires to do, your purpose tells them why and how you're going to execute it. This is critical for keeping stakeholders aligned and working together toward a common goal.

Often, you can divide a purpose statement into two parts:

To achieve what		By doing what
This clarifies your desired outcome	**+**	This lays out the steps you'll take toward it.

For example, building off the workforce-specific vision above, the purpose could be to fill internal skills gaps by completing a skills mapping assessment of the business to align educational offerings with existing or upcoming needs.

3. IDENTIFY SUCCESS CRITERIA

Once you know what you're working toward, you can begin breaking it down into concrete steps and pieces. This will give you tangible markers to work toward and will help you establish key metrics and benchmarks. To this end, you want to look closely at your organization's goals, key performance indicators (KPIs), milestones and actions.

GOALS

The goals are the discrete outcomes you're looking to achieve. As you're building them, keep the below in mind:

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

- **Phase:** With which phase of your transformation is each goal associated? Will each phase have one overarching goal associated with it or will there be a series of smaller goals?

- **Relevance:** What needs does each goal address? How will individual goals affect your key audiences and stakeholders? Overall, how specific and targeted are your goals?

- **Realization:** What does your organization need to do to achieve its goals? How challenging are they?

KPIS

Once you know what your goals are, you need to figure out how you're going to track your progress. This is where KPIs come in.

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

- Are there any specific benchmarks you need to consider?

Think too about how technology can help you assess your achievements.

- Where will the data be taken from?

- What form will it be in?

- How often will it be collected? Will it be automated, or does it need to be done manually?

- Which stakeholders need to have visibility?

- What processes are in place to act on relevant insights?

MILESTONES AND ACTIONS

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 |
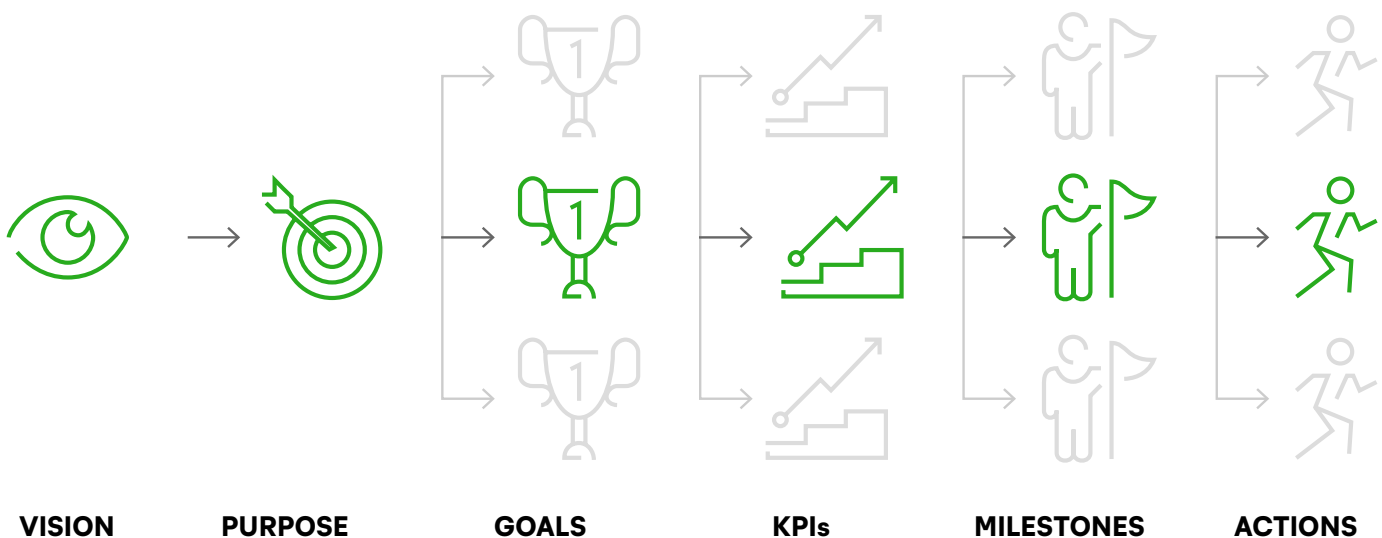
4. CREATE YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN

A communication plan is a roadmap that clarifies what your messages will be, who will be sending them and who needs to see them. It's also a key part of successful change management initiatives.

Are you anticipating big changes at your organization? Check out **The Complete Guide to Corporate Change Management.**

ASSEMBLE THE TEAM

Before moving onto the finer details that go into your communication plan, you need to understand who in your organization is going to be responsible for which parts of the strategy. **Research from Prosci** shows that for updates about the personal impacts of change, 70% of employees wanted to hear from their manager. By comparison, for messages about the business reasons for change, 75% of employees wanted communication to come from senior leaders.

Name	Title	Role	Specialization

UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE

In addition to having a clear picture of who's going to be creating and sending the messages, you also need to know who will be receiving them. What does an average day look like for them? What methods of communication are they most comfortable using? What pains can you solve?

Name	Title	Role	Specialization

DEVELOP THE COMMUNICATIONS

As you're developing each communication or communication sequence, consider the questions below:

- What persona are you targeting? How do you expect they'll respond to the communication?
- What's the aim of your communication? What's the main message you want to convey?
- Who from your team needs to be involved? What are their responsibilities and roles?
- What channel(s) will you use? What day(s) and time(s) will your messages be sent?

IMPLEMENT AND EVALUATE

As with the other components of your online learning strategy, hitting send doesn't mean your work is done. You need to monitor your communications to make sure messages are hitting the mark.

5. 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.

6. EVALUATE THE IMPACT

You want the data you pull to showcase the success of your learning programs to align with the needs 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 LXP itself, which can give you valuable insights into trends with adoption, engagement, performance and more

- enterprise-level systems like your HRIS 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.

Partner with D2L for Business to maximize the impact of your learning investment and achieve your organization's learning goals.
Get details on all the benefits of D2L for Business and how to get started

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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 enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world.

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