

title

Accelerate Workforce Development with Targeted Learning Portals

body

No matter where your organization is in the Learning Maturity Index¹ or its size, your business and your people can benefit from a learning portal targeted to the individual needs of your people.

Having one place to go for learning is indeed a plus, but a well-designed portal does much more:

- Provides a conduit for two-way communication between learners and those who provide the resources to improve the user experience,
- Enables social learning, so people can learn from each other.
- Fosters an organization wide-conversation about improving performance and sustainability through learning.

The structure of learning portals depends on your industry, business strategy, and the needs of your people. There are many ways to structure learning portals support your business. Yours may reside inside your LMS, or as a layer above the LMS that aggregates activities inside and outside the formal learning system, or as an independent web page.

Learning Portals for Audience Segmentation

Many learning systems and portal providers give you a way to segment your audiences by organization, function, and job role. These segmentations are common in organizations that direct and “push” formal learning. Some allow you to define audiences in any way you like.

You could use a series of nested portals to support any kind of activity. They might include:

- Organizational initiatives, such as cultural change or diversity
- Projects
- Centers of excellence
- Cross-functional teams
- Suppliers, partners, distributors, customers, and other external entities

Learning portals can support your efforts in overcoming many of the challenges your organization faces. In this white paper, we will discuss some of the barriers and show how learning portals can help you meet them.

The Learning Disconnect

In the second decade of the century, everything has become digital. Businesses and other organizations are reinventing themselves to meet the rapid-fire changes and challenges of the 21st-century. They are reshaping their workforces to be more agile, placing high demands on learning and development to upskill employees. Lifetime careers in a single skill group are

becoming rare. The half-life of skills is now about five years and working careers may now span as much as 70 years.ⁱⁱ

Organizations are not keeping up with the changes. In the Deloitte 2018 Human Capital Trends survey, 53% of respondents said their skill development efforts to defined career paths, but 72% agreed that career paths have become nontraditional – determined by the individual.ⁱⁱⁱ

Leading organizations are embracing the change, but many L&D departments are falling behind. Half don't have learning programs to build the skills of the future.^{iv} Less than 30% say learning delivery infrastructures and functions are prepared to meet business needs.^v

The most severe disconnect may be between L&D and the people they serve. According to the 2017 Towards Maturity Benchmark Survey, “65% of L&D think that staff are not able to manage their own learning.” That may be true, but it means that the first order of business must be to teach people how to learn. The report goes on to say:

- “14% use coaching and mentoring is an important part of their work culture.
- 8% help people locate in-house experts when they need them.
- 1% use available support systems to promote self-reliance, not a culture of dependency.”^{vi}

These responses may be, for some, a venting of frustration over the constraints people inside the profession face, but even if the numbers were much better, they would still point to a significant disconnect.

What does this have to do with learning portals?

A learning portal is not the lifesaving medicine that will cure your learning and development ailments. It is the mechanism that delivers the medication. Your portal will not develop new learning programs, upskill your workforce, or transform your organization, but it can be the tool that allows you to make those things happen.

A portal will provide communication channels, motivational tools, and universal access to learning. It will enable you to fine-tune learning to each individual's needs, collect feedback on that learning, and respond quickly and appropriately. Portals can provide learning support limited only by your creativity and the capability of your technology.

Becoming a Learning Organization

In the remainder of this paper, we will show the characteristics that describe a dynamic, agile learning organization. We have distilled the best of what defines those organizations and show you how a learning portal can support your efforts to develop your people.

We urge you not to be too judgmental of your own efforts. Many factors influence the current state of your learning and development capability. The structure or type of business may not be conducive to individual development. You may be among the organizations whose leaders do not have a commitment to learning. You could be constrained by resources.

The point of our discussion is not perfection — it is growth toward excellence.

Characteristics of a Learning Organization

What we describe here is the ideal state of a learning organization. Only the best achieve these standards. What is important is that you strive to attain them within the limits of your resources and capability.

“A well-designed set of learning portals, targeted to individual learning needs, can become a vital component of your efforts to become an agile learning organization.”

1. **Learning is an essential component of business strategy.** The organization is on a constant quest to develop a culture of learning that enables, encourages and expects personal and professional development. Learning aligns to both business goals and to individual growth.

A vital activity in any organizational transformation is two-way multi-channel communication. You can embed conversation and collaboration tools in a learning portal and use news pages and links to keep people informed. You can enable notifications of new items to draw your people to the portal.

We have one caveat: Keeping your communications and news fresh is an absolute must. Stale sends a powerful negative message.

2. **Learning governance is an organization-wide activity,** not limited to L&D. Operational managers and senior executives have an active role in learning management and their performance indicators reflect that responsibility.

A learning governance portal may be a useful tool in bringing the right people together to share resources and collaborate in planning activities.

3. **The organization has a complete portfolio** of formal training courses and resources and effectively markets them.

Your portal can give direct access to formal training, with a training calendar, notifications about upcoming events, and progress indicators. An excellent portal will also display achievements using badges or other gamification techniques.

Training offerings can be fine-tuned to the individual's needs and interests if you solicit input and allow experts inside your organizational processes and functions to guide you.

4. **The organization holds managers accountable** for the development of their people and trains them how to it. Coaching and mentoring form the bedrock of the employee-manager relationship. With support from their leaders, managers ensure that people have time to learn.

Each manager is a learner who is responsible for others' development. A manager's portal should include dashboards that will help track each individual's needs, progress, and achievements, as well as roll-up data on team status and results. It should also include collaboration tools for instant communication with the team.

5. **By design, learning is an engaging, motivating, and personalized experience.** Individuals take responsibility for advancing their skills, and their managers hold them accountable. The organization teaches people how to learn and how to manage their

development so self-directed learning is prevalent at every worker level. It strives to reignite the creativity education and work trained out of them.^{vii}

We have long recognized that individuals in an organization each have different learning goals, career aspirations, and learning preferences. Organizations have been trending toward self-directed learning, but the results have not yet been stellar. Over half of organizations have difficulty engaging people in their personal development.

Many people are never taught how to learn, or that lifelong learning is a valuable skill. They are merely expected to learn whatever their academic institutions or employers tell them to learn. Your portal is an opportunity to give them the tools and knowledge they need to take charge of their own development.

Your portal can help you

- capture each individual's interests and level of knowledge through dynamic self-assessment,
- learn about their aspirations and needs through continuous feedback, and
- embed a chatbot that will ask prompting questions about where they would like to go in their learning.

6. **Learning is a social experience.** Managers encourage their people to share their knowledge and learn from each other. The organization provides technology tools that support knowledge sharing, resource curation, and collaborative problem-solving. L&D provides training to teach people how to collaborate and share knowledge.

An effective portal will have tools to embed collaboration software, such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Workspace. It will make sharing of knowledge easy and accessible, with a searchable repository for self-curated content.

7. **The L&D staff has professional and technical skills** to facilitate blended learning and performance support, develops its professional consulting skills, and is willing to "let go" and assume a consulting role in developing people and the organization.

Consulting and marketing are essential skills for L&D. Consulting requires a change in mind set to a performance focus where business leaders and managers are responsible for results and L&D is the trusted advisor and enabler.

Without dynamic multi-channel messaging to make learning top of mind, your portal could become a ghost town, as many have in the past. Leverage your portal as a communication medium and draw attention to its resources with persuasive communications. You can engage staff members in learning about persuasive writing, partner with your marketing team, or hire a professional.

Deploying Targeted Learning Portals

There are many ways to implement learning portals. Your choice will vary according to your needs and resources. There are options available for any size organization.

- A web page on your intranet and extranet. You will need resources available to create and deploy the page.
- A portal provided in your LMS. Your LMS may not support aggregation of all your learning resources or the communication capabilities and collaboration tools you need. The tools for creating portals vary among providers, with the best providing drag and drop components.
- Portal vendors and consultants who build your portals and deploy them for you.
- Customizable pre-defined templates built for non-programmers, deployable inside or outside your LMS.
- For customers, you may be able to create it in your CRM.

Increase Learning Utilization and Transform your Organization

A well-designed set of learning portals, targeted to individual learning needs, can become a vital component of your efforts to become an agile learning organization. It can serve as a communication and collaboration tool for developing a learning strategy and communicating your cultural message.

It can bring all of your learning assets into one place, including user-curated resources. In so doing you can reduce duplications across the enterprise, lowering total costs.

A targeted portal can make learning as an engaging, motivated, and personalized experience, providing users with a one-stop information and an access center for all their learning needs. It can also create a two-way communication flow between learners and L&D staff to improve the individual experience.

A learning portal, used effectively, will increase utilization of learning assets and the return on your learning investment. We recommend you measure the impact on top-line results.

ⁱ "The Transformation Curve - 2018 Benchmark Research." Towards Maturity. January 31, 2018. <https://towardsmaturity.org/2018/01/31/transformation/>.

ⁱⁱ Bersin, Josh. "Catch the wave: The 21st-century career." Deloitte review, issue 21. July 31, 2017. <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/deloitte-review/issue-21/changing-nature-of-careers-in-21st-century.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends: From careers to experiences: new pathways." Deloitte Insights. 2018. <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends.html>.

^{iv} Johnson, Dani. "High impact learning organizations: maturity model and top findings." Deloitte consulting LLP. 2017.

^v 2018 Learning State of the Industry. HCM advisory group, Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Services, Chief learning Officer. 2018.

^{vi} Towards Maturity.

vii TEDtalksDirector. "Do Schools Kill Creativity? | Sir Ken Robinson." YouTube. January 06, 2007.