How to transform learning

On 18th July, a group of L&D leaders from some of the world’s leading organisations joined LEO and Towards Maturity to identify how we can transform learning for a world demanding innovation.

Here’s what we found out.
Transforming learning – why now?

70%

of L&D leaders at this event said that transforming learning is now a business priority. A further 22% were saying they had tried to transform learning before and needed new ideas.

So why has this become so important today?

Over the past 10 years, Towards Maturity has analysed the successes and learning approaches of over 3,000 L&D leaders in their annual benchmark study. It is clear that learning innovation is delivering bottom line results.

It is also clear from this research that the top learning companies reporting the most significant business successes are following a new learning agenda. This agenda is focused on business outcomes such as performance and productivity, and looks beyond the course to help support workplace performance:

The need for learning transformation is not new, but it is becoming even more of a priority. Talent, technology and change are now at the top of today’s business leader’s agenda, providing a clear opportunity for L&D to redefine their offering to re-engage with business.

It is clear, then, that the time for change is now, and this event was designed to collaboratively identify how we can all improve our learning programmes for good.
New learning agenda

1. Two-way business alignment
   - E.G. Learning supports the skills the business needs

2. Respond faster
   - E.G. Learning is delivered in time to support the business needs

3. Transform training
   - E.G. Blend a wide range of learning technologies to redefine the course

4. Develop learning culture
   - E.G. Staff know how to productively connect and share

5. Integrate learning and talent
   - E.G. Learning technologies actively support the onboarding process

6. Flexible learning
   - E.G. Users encouraged to use own devices for learning

7. Customer-activated learning
   - E.G. Users involved in learning design

8. Simplify
   - E.G. Provide continuing professional development to learning professionals

9. Equip L&D as agents of change
   - E.G.
Sexy, unique and organic: what will tomorrow’s learning look like?

This word cloud illustrates the delegates’ shared vision of successful learning transform.

The inclusion of words like ‘sexy’, ‘excitement’, ‘energy’ and ‘impact’ show that organisations are crying out for something new and dynamic. Now more than ever, we need more than just another new e-learning course or to cut the amount of face-to-face training. It is now about taking a completely fresh approach to learning, ensuring it is ‘embedded’ into the workplace, a ‘process’ rather than an event and ‘personal’. To redefine their offering to re-engage with business.

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A vision for the future

LEO’s Chief Strategy Officer, Piers Lea, outlined his vision for the future of learning, with some impressive examples of organisations who have already set the wheels of change in motion.

In a world moving faster and becoming more complex than ever, change is inevitable. Businesses need to make sure they are equipped to keep up with the speed of modern business to retain their competitive advantage. To do this, we need to think about our people, process, content and technology, and how we can join them up as part of our organisation’s culture.

Some organisations have already started to see the results of their learning transformation.

LEO’s British Airways ‘Outstanding Leaders’ programme took 4,750 leaders on a four-month journey. This programme transformed BA’s approach to learning, moving from ‘events’ to ‘opening channels’ to facilitate conversation and maintain momentum over time.

Jaguar Land Rover’s F-Type app made the switch from just-in-case training to just-in-time performance support. This app was used by customer-facing staff in 140 markets, enabling salespeople to interact effectively with more than 50,000 customers.

The Wellcome Foundation’s ‘AXON’ game marked a change from delivering training content to improving cognitive ability. In its first weekend, the game achieved one million plays, and three million in the first month.
A vision for the future

The Towards Maturity Study shows that top learning organisations focus on alignment, working with business leaders to define the need for learning and demonstrating the value they have added. Piers suggested that we ask three questions when we are evaluating the success of our efforts to transform learning:

1. Has it ‘landed’?
   An effective internal launch programme will raise awareness and fuel engagement and completion rates.

2. Has anyone learnt anything?
   An effective internal launch programme will raise awareness and fuel engagement and completion rates.

3. Has it had any business impact?
   An effective internal launch programme will raise awareness and fuel engagement and completion rates.

In 70% of the organisations represented at the event, there are missed opportunities to agree performance indicators with business sponsors upfront at least some of the time.

14% of attendees reported that they never took this chance, meaning that many of us are trying to transform learning without having a clear idea of how we will measure success.
How can we engage business leaders more successfully?

If learning transformation starts with clear alignment, how can we tune into business requirements and engage business leaders more successfully?

Attendees on the day provided some powerful tips:

“We are now thinking about business priorities rather than strategy. We are asking our leaders whether or not we have the capability to achieve our goals in the context of the business. Our leaders are interested in the ability to achieve strategic goals rather than the strategy itself.”

“We are talking in the language of business rather than the language of learning. This allows us to provide time-poor business leaders with only the relevant information in terms they will be able to engage with.”

“We make sure our data is not just quantitative, but also qualitative. Anecdotal evidence can be just as compelling as figures, and reminds us to focus on the end customer and the real value our learning programmes contribute to the organisation as a whole.”

“We are asking the difficult questions to get the answers we really need.”

We were reassured to discover that almost half of attendees always blend a range of technology in their learning programme. This shows that organisations are starting to think about learning as more than just a series of standalone courses, and that we are becoming more open to the idea of introducing technology into the overall learning architecture.”
What does learning transformation look like?

The senior leadership team at LEO provided insights into what learning transformation looks like and how it can make a difference to corporate training in our organisations.

Strategies for workplace learning are essentially strategies for change and there is more to successfully achieving change than knowledge and skills transfer. We also need to address motivation and the wider work environment. So as learning and development professionals, we need to be aligned to HR, IT and marketing in order to successfully drive through organisational change. There are a variety of ways to measure success but it is key to identify the measures before starting the initiative. Success measures should be related to key business drivers. One example of this is LEO’s work with a global automotive client, each salesperson sold an average of 2.4 more cars a year after completing the learning initiative. These types of bottom-line measures are key to proving the success of our learning and building a solid business case for our key stakeholders.

Imogen Casebourne
Director of Learning, LEO

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What does learning transformation look like?

Learning transformation means constructing an entire learning architecture rather than thinking about learning in individual components. We should ask ourselves what already exists and what value our learning should add to this. Our understanding of the 70:20:10 model of learning gives us the authority to explore new approaches to learning such as performance support with sales apps and vehicle diagnostics.

Another important element of learning transformation is social learning, which is known to be very successful in strong communities. However, we must avoid thinking of social learning as a bolt-on around e-learning, as this is when forums, chatrooms and manufactured social platforms go unused. It’s time to start thinking about what’s beyond the bolt-on, and to design social learning into our blends to unlock its real value as a way to promote alignment and sustainability.

In this year’s Towards Maturity Benchmark report, 95% of L&D leaders said they wanted to aid facilitation of social learning, but only 12% of organisations are actually using it. With 84% of learners willing to use technology to share knowledge with peers, it is clear that the appetite is there for social learning, and we now need to find a way to make the best possible use of it.

Andrew Joly
Director of Strategic Design, LEO

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What does learning transformation look like?

We need to create memorable moments of magic. From our lessons at school we know that a fun science experiment or watching Shakespeare performed on stage, created moments that helped us really engage with a topic. Games can be used to engage learners in the same way by recreating and prolonging the learning point. Games with purpose encourage exploration and repetition, helping to cement learning and keeping people coming back over and over again for a more sustainable learning programme.

Case study:
Crafty Cut – Creating a moment of magic
Crafty Cut is a game which allows schoolchildren to explore geometry in a highly interactive and engaging way. Based on a unique cutting mechanic, players are challenged to reveal new 2D facets from 3D shapes which become increasingly complex as they progress through the game. Performance is based on the quality of the shape match, and is graded based on the correct number of sides, correct internal angles and correct length of sides.

Giving pupils a more ‘hands-on’ experience helps familiarise them with the names and properties of shapes and piquing their curiosity with what is often considered a fairly dry topic. It also helps to simplify maths, which many pupils find an intimidating subject, by making it more fun.

Paul Canty
Managing Director, Preloaded
Transforming learning – the challenges

48% of attendees on the day said that they found integrating learning and work the biggest challenge to transforming learning, while 42% struggle to get business buy-in. As major barriers to learning transformation, it is important that we address these challenges to reopen the opportunities for organisational improvement.

Some of the specific challenges encountered in our attendees’ businesses included:

- We don’t practise what we preach
- We only have negative internal communications
- Our strategy is missing
- Our budget is limited
- Our L&D capability is stuck in the idea of everything being a course
- We need to move from smarter decisions to wiser decisions
- We think about ‘training’ rather than ‘learning’ as a broader concept
- We are limited by the technology available to us
- Our learning is often not specific to the learner or role
- We struggle to get buy-in from our senior leaders
- We should break the mindset that learning must take place in a classroom
- We don’t trust our learners to learn socially
Transforming learning – what initial steps can be taken?

L&D leaders on the day reflected on what they were doing well in their organisations, and it was fantastic to recognise the steps everyone is already taking to improve learning in their organisations. Successes included:

- Organisational openness to exploring new avenues and innovative ideas
- Creating dynamic learner journeys with feedback loops
- Trialling new approaches, identifying what works well and doing more of it
- Integrating the learning process into the workplace
- Recognising that very small things can be transformational, and that it’s not always about reinventing the wheel
- Using performance support when face-to-face training or e-learning courses aren’t practical
- Questioning whether it’s a course we really need

It is clear that the interest and business priority for learning transformation is paramount but in order to achieve this, the group identified three specific areas that might need to be addressed:

- How do we create the business case for change?
- How can we support learning beyond the formal?
- How can we use games to engage staff?

Working groups led by the LEO experts allowed our attendees to share their experiences and practical tips and take inspiration from the successes and failures of other organisations. The following pages display the collective wisdom from the day.
How to create the business case

This group, led by Piers Lea and Imogen Casebourne, agreed that leadership is demanding (or in some cases, ‘should be demanding’) more results-based data to support future investment or prevent budget cuts. They discussed ways to collect real data and how to use it to prove the impact of learning.

Are we measuring? How are we doing it?

Many of us are only measuring in very basic terms, and often the data we collect does not show the impact of our programmes. Marketing departments are used to gathering data to prove the ROI of their investments, an example that L&D departments should follow to build similarly results-driven cases. Some organisations are assessing performance before and after the initiative has taken place to measure ‘learning’, while others are using satisfaction surveys (for both learners and end customers) to measure the business impact. We are recording learner stories as qualitative research to justify our case, and adding the numbers from quantitative survey-based research and sales figures to build a compelling business case.

What are the challenges of collecting data?

This group reported that one of the key barriers to data collection is time. Often, we are pressured to implement the learning programme without having a chance to set clear measurement outlines in place or to follow up on measuring results afterwards. Also, we are sometimes asked by leaders to deliver a specific solution without having the chance to question the drivers, making it impossible to know what to use as a measure of success.

How can we solve these challenges?

The value of benchmark research, such as that conducted by Towards Maturity, should not be underestimated as a source against which you can compare your own organisation. This benchmark data will be particularly useful if it is broken down into sectors, so you can compare your business with others like yours. We should also look at industry case studies and success stories to inspire us to try similar changes in our own organisations. We can set up surveys to collect quantitative data and that can also be found in existing locations, such as records of customer satisfaction, sales, staff turnover etc. To quickly collect qualitative data, we can use techniques such as the Brinkerhoff success case method, where we interview a small selection of individuals who are succeeding and those who are not, and focus on key differences between the two.

Following these tips will help you prove the success of your learning initiative to stakeholders, helping you secure more investment for future improvements. Don’t be afraid – just do it!
What practical strategies can we use to build communities?

First and foremost, we need to focus on dispersed communities who have a greater need for social modes of learning. We should also stop being afraid of building short, sharp, purpose-built communities which are closed upon completion of a project, rather than letting the community fizzle out. It is up to us to find ways to establish trust in our social learning groups through moderation, rules and safe channels of communication. Social learning is particularly useful for induction training, where we can seed new behaviours effectively. Showing learners what they don't know will encourage them to turn to their communities to find it, making content more of a 'pull' rather than pushing material out to learners.

Incorporating achievements, such as badges or rewards, into our social strategy can also aid motivation and engagement.

What is stopping it from happening?

One of the main issues with social learning is that it can initially take a lot of curation before it picks up traction and becomes self-sustaining, making it a time-intensive process to begin with. It is important to build trust in the process, people and community from both the management level and the learners for social learning to work. We also need to break the paradigm of 'knowledge is power' to ensure that knowledge is readily shared throughout the learner community. Many learners also express concern about being seen to ‘make waves’, making the potential for anonymity an essential part of learning communities. Stakeholders and business leaders often struggle to see the benefit of social techniques, meaning we need to be able to prove to them that it is an easy process from which to get good value.

How to support learning beyond the formal

Andrew Joly led a session about moving away from the outdated idea that learning is about formal training events. It’s all very well acknowledging this as a concept, but it’s time for us to do something about it. The group discussed practical measures organisations are taking to introduce informal learning, which painted a fascinating picture of today’s business approach to courses and beyond.

What is happening?

One organisation reported creating a resource library, comprising lots of short vodcasts and podcasts, to address new procedures and initiatives. Response rates are being captured to confirm ‘landing’, though our attendees recognised that this approach is still more about ‘pushing’ content out than ‘pulling’ learners in. Another business tried using webinars to convert non-social users. While the statistics showed a lot of visits to the site, contributions remained low, reinforcing the need to look more closely to check that our programmes are actually working.

Another created a fully searchable resource based on FAQs about various processes in the organisation to address recurring concerns to save time and make it easier for people to find what they need. This group agreed that it has proved much more successful to use familiar, trusted tools than to force new ones onto learners for the sake of it.

‘Corporate networks are normally embarrassing copies of what people really use. It’s like going to a party and watching your dad dance.”
How to use games techniques to engage

Paul Canty led a discussion about the power of games with purpose to engage and motivate learners in and outside the workplace. Games with purpose are games designed with an objective in mind, whether this is to inform, to train or to make the player understand a new concept. Paul’s group looked at how we can incorporate educational games into our learning architecture.

What are games great for? What do they do well?

Immersion, engagement, self-paced learning, fun, solution discovery, experimentation, exploring harmful impact in a safe environment, experiencing something unfamiliar, stimulating competition, creating motivation, improving learner dexterity and demonstrating learner progression.

From the group discussion, we discovered that simulation games are particularly good for learners working in professions such as medicine. Some of the participants pointed out that it is difficult to get people who are used to learning from text-based sources to see the advantages of gamified learning. Simulations appear to be a useful way to bridge the gap between more traditional learning methods and games-based learning, and can help staff and L&D departments see eye to eye using a ‘pull’ rather than push out material to learners. Incorporating achievements, such as badges or rewards, into our social strategy can also aid motivation and engagement.

What are the challenges of gamification?

Paul’s group agreed that the quality and functionality of games is vital. It is no good making a game for the sake of it, or because it is the ‘in’ thing to do, if the quality is poor. The lengthy testing process can also rack up costs quickly, making games seem prohibitively expensive if we don’t understand what we can get for our budget. With this in mind, we need to be ready to demonstrate the ROI of educational games upfront, which can be difficult in more traditional organisations. Games also allow us to collect huge volumes of data, which we need to understand in order to interpret them effectively to find measurable results.

How do we use games successfully?

Many organisations find that integrating games with purpose into their wider blended learning programme is the best approach. This makes the gameplay a single mode in the mix, which may also include sharing, listening, watching or exploring. A subtle approach can be used for those who are apprehensive about using games for learning, such as using iPads in the classroom. Consumer and mainstream games can also be adapted for a learning purpose. For example, the city management simulation game SimCity can be used to enable learning about the finance system or town planning skills, which also makes it easy to create scenario-based learning.
Time for action

Laura Overton summarised the outputs from the day. It is clearly time for action rather than talk. The day provided food for thought but delegates were encouraged to go back and take time out to systematically reflect on their own learning transformation journey.

Reflection improves performance and it’s time for us to stop and think about what we’re doing. This can happen at two levels, the first starting with the problem itself. If we resist the pressure from business leaders to implement a specific solution, we can step back and get to the real root of our challenges and decide whether or not that solution really is our best option. Once we know what that problem is, we can then establish how we will measure and determine the success of our solution, and only then can we turn to actually designing that solution.

Secondly we can stop and reflect on the progress we have currently made on our learning transformation journey. How are we comparing with some of the top performing organisations? What can we learn from them that will inform the next steps we should take? Participants were invited to invest an hour in holistically assessing their own learning strategy approach using the Towards Maturity Benchmark at: www.towardsmaturity.org/benchmarktoday.

Finally learning transformation involved embracing organisational change. We are spoilt for choice when it comes to the range and variety of technology on offer, and we need to be willing to combine these in the right way to construct a learning architecture that really works. Whether it’s social learning, games with purpose, performance support resources or anything else, we should also be ready and willing to record the results of our efforts. This will allow us to prove the business value of our learning transformation, enabling us to continue to improve with increased time, investment and C-level buy-in.

LEO’s experts want to help you transform learning in your organisation. Talk to us today to find out how a powerful learning programme will improve your business results and efficiencies for good.

Benchmark your learning strategy with top performing learning organisations at www.towardsmaturity.org/benchmark today.
LEO believes that technology-enabled learning innovation has the power to deliver truly transformational results. Our purpose is to help clients deploy learning technology to deliver outcomes precisely aligned to their business goals. Backed by more than 30 years of experience, we design engaging learning architectures that fit seamlessly into businesses and improve performance throughout the entire organisation. LEO has the deep understanding of learning design and technology combined with our pioneering, creative approach to drive learning transformation.

Towards Maturity is a benchmarking research practice that provides independent expert advice and support in the application of learning innovation to accelerate business performance. Uniquely among research-based organisations in this space, Towards Maturity leverages the wealth of data provided by its ongoing benchmark—an internationally recognised longitudinal study based on the input of 2,900 organisations and over 13,000 learners over 10 years. This powers a new authoritative standard of measurement: the Towards Maturity Index (TMI). We work with Associate Partners and Ambassadors who share our vision and values. More information, free case studies and resources are available at:

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Thank you