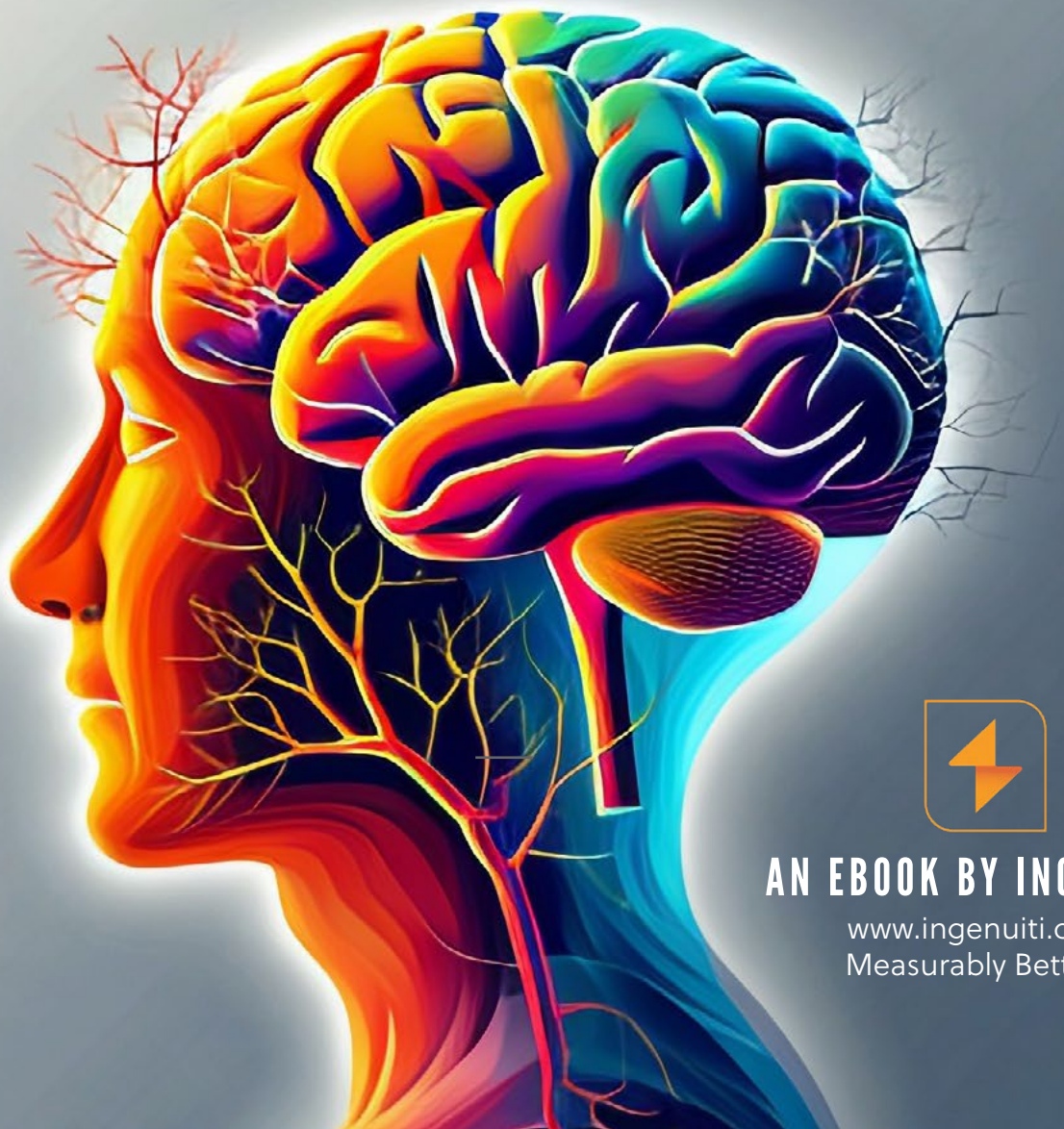


EMBRACING THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE CORPORATE LEARNING LEADER



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EDITORIAL

The role of the learning leader has evolved dramatically, demanding a diverse skill set and a forward-thinking approach. Today's learning leaders have the opportunity to shape the future, ignite potential, and build a learning culture where people can grow and improve. This ebook, "Learning Leader As...", explores the core competencies essential for success in today's Learning and Development industry. We'll examine the importance of anticipating future needs, aligning learning with business goals, embracing technology, and building strong relationships within and beyond the L&D function. This collection of articles offers insights and practical strategies to empower learning leaders to enhance individual capabilities and truly transform lives and organizations.

CHAPTER #1

WHY STRATEGIC THINKING MATTERS

**“LEARNING LEADERS NEED TO STOP BEING ORDER-TAKERS.”
-BRANDON CARSON**

This memorable statement was made by Brandon Carson, Vice President of Learning, Leadership, and Cultural Experience at Starbucks, when he joined an Ingenuiti [webinar](#) on communicating the value of learning to executive leadership. We all know what he means: too often, we are not part of planning the overarching strategies that direct learning. Instead, someone hands us topics to cover as the next thing to do.

Brandon encourages learning leaders to realize they are not fighting for a seat at the decision-making table. Instead, according to him, we are the table. We are essential to the organization's forward movement. We are integral to onboarding, reskilling, upskilling, productivity, compliance, and safety. Learning's contribution to the company's future is vital. To succeed in this role, learning leaders must be strategic thinkers.

What Is Strategic Thinking?

Strategic thinking is a specific mental activity. It is a skill that needs to be honed and developed. It means being intentional rather than reactive. It is purposeful. Strategic thinkers see the big picture and have developed the desire to lift their eyes to the horizon. To think strategically requires committed time and space to entertain big thoughts.

The best strategic leaders have the ability to think about how systems in complex organizations relate to one another. They can identify opportunities but carefully track common obstacles that too often stand in the way of progress.

Strategic leaders are comfortable with complexity and ambiguity. Even more challenging, they can deeply consider concepts at odds with one another. F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said:



“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”

~ F. Scott Fitzgerald ~

Even then, strategic thinkers will continue to search for better solutions and new information.

What Strategic Learning Leaders Do

Anticipate future skills and knowledge needs:

By thinking strategically, learning leaders can foresee potential skill and knowledge gaps within the organization and develop long-term learning strategies to address them. Creating a list of anticipated skills is a good place to start, but conversing with various people in your organization will be helpful. Don't limit yourself to executive leaders; sometimes, the best knowledge comes from the people daily accomplishing the work.

Align learning initiatives with business goals: Strategic thinking helps learning leaders

understand the overall business strategy and align learning and development initiatives to support the organization's objectives. How familiar are you with your organization's mission, vision, and values? If your company has an annual plan, do you know what it is? Have you determined where learning can and will contribute to achieving these goals?

Embrace technology and innovation: Strategic thinking helps learning leaders identify and leverage new technologies and innovative learning methods to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of learning programs. Not every new technology solves a problem or brings improvement. As a leader, you need to investigate carefully and implement new tools to improve outcomes rather than simply pursuing the latest trend.

Benchmark competitors and peers: See what others in similar organizations are doing. What is working, and what is not? Devour webinars, books, and articles from people inside your industry and those in other industries who have valuable ideas. Constantly seek out new information.

Manage budget and resources: Strategic thinking enables learning leaders to effectively allocate resources and budget to learning initiatives that provide the most value and impact for the organization. How carefully do you track your budget? Do you know of any high-expense, low-impact activities where those resources could be better used? How much are you spending on underutilized software? Where are you looking for efficiencies? Which mission-critical projects should you spend more on?

Demonstrate the value of learning: Strategic thinking enables learning leaders to measure the impact of learning initiatives on business outcomes and demonstrate the value of learning and development to senior management. This is one of the greatest challenges for learning leaders. It can be time-consuming, costly, and frustrating because the data you seek is not always readily available. Sometimes, a mountain of data is available, but its meaning is unclear. Understanding and communicating how learning is making a difference in people's lives and your organization's future is worth the time and effort.

Build a global learning culture: Strategic thinking allows learning leaders to create a global culture of continuous learning within the organization, which is essential for adapting to changes and staying competitive. Strong learning cultures exist when learners value and actively seek out learning opportunities. They see them as a means to improve their skills in their current role and potentially find new opportunities. Have you spent time talking to learners about what is working and what is not?

Empower others to achieve their best: Effectively serving others in your organization does not happen without strategic foresight. Create opportunities to listen and respond to the needs of the people on your L&D team, the leadership of your organization, and the learners who depend on you to create relevant training initiatives. Does your leadership style encourage others to thrive?

Transform your organization: By thinking strategically, learning leaders can anticipate changes in the business environment and proactively adapt learning initiatives to support the organization in responding to these changes. About the time we think we have a perfect system or process established, something will challenge it. It might

be changes to your core business, something happening in the marketplace, or new technology. Leading with wide eyes open is essential for helping your organization move forward.

Make time for strategic thinking: Perhaps this is the biggest challenge of all, given the number of tasks demanding attention. How much time do you spend thinking about your learning strategy?





CHAPTER #2

LEARNING LEADER AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN EXPERT

DOES A LEARNING LEADER HAVE TO BE AN INSTRUCTIONAL
DESIGNER TO GUIDE THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM?

We are also involved in strategic planning for the organization's overall learning and development efforts and oversee the fulfillment of those plans. This process involves assessing training needs, designing learning programs, implementing training initiatives, managing training budgets, and evaluating the effectiveness of those programs.

An intriguing question is whether learning leaders need to possess the expertise of an instructional designer to guide their teams effectively

HOW MUCH DO WE REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PROCESS, TOOLS, AND SKILLS USED FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN?

To gain clarity, let's first understand the backgrounds of most learning leaders. Traditionally, training departments were managed by individuals with a strong education or instructional design background. However, these departments were often small and had limited organizational influence.

Fast forward to today, and we see a paradigm shift. Learning and Development (L&D) teams have gained prominence at the C-suite level, especially with the rise of the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) role. Consequently, there is wide variability in the backgrounds of learning leaders. Many come from fields like HR, psychology, education, or even general management, often armed with program management experience but lacking an understanding of the science behind learning and development.

Learning leaders who arrive from general business or HR roles tend to understand how the organization works at a higher level and provide a bigger picture to the team. While instructional designers focus on content creation



and instructional strategies, L&D managers have a broader role, including managing the overall learning and development function and aligning learning initiatives with organizational goals. However, if we don't understand the science of learning or how the design process is critical to delivering quality, it can create frustration for our teams.

A learning leader must not merely serve as an order-taker but needs to grasp the nuances of instructional design to effectively lead and oversee the development of learning strategies. This knowledge enables us to assess the efficacy of our learning initiatives. We can ensure that learning objectives align with business objectives, supporting the whole organization.





How can a learning leader who lacks instructional design experience bridge the gap?

Immersing Ourselves in the Process of Designing Learning Experiences.

Even if a leader does have an instructional design background, it is easy to become out of touch. Pick up a storyboard, interact with the team during brainstorming sessions, and revisit foundational skills. A leader who occasionally tests the design process will see where breakdowns occur, where improvements can be made, and the complexity of the design process.

Leaders who stay involved tend to set realistic expectations and foster a collaborative environment where continuous improvement is the norm. Our awareness of the current process will help us establish and maintain quality controls. Are roles, responsibilities, and processes clear? Leading a team with a culture of open feedback, where

processes can be refined and quality issues addressed without blame, improves both the output, the quality of learning, and team morale.

Familiarize Ourselves with the Tools and Technology that Our Teams Use.

Technology is another area to consider investing in as a successful learning leader. Becoming familiar with the tools that our teams use (or need to use) will increase our effectiveness in leading. Be on the lookout to provide your team with the necessary technological tools, software, hardware, or access. Sometimes, a relatively small investment in the right software, access to a better set of graphics, two or three monitors for every team member, or other investments can improve creativity and innovation.

Identify the Competencies Our Teams Have and Need.

Define the skills your current team already has, as well as those your team really needs. Allocating

resources for training and sending team members to conferences can address skill or knowledge gaps, thereby preparing them for project demands. Perhaps you need some of your IDs to become more creative writers, utilizing more storytelling. Or perhaps they need to develop advanced Storyline development skills. Maybe you're finding an increased need for animation, etc.

What about AR or VR development (or maybe that can be outsourced as needed?) Maybe you need more graphic design help as you add more ILT training to your programs. IDs are asked to wear many hats, and it's tough to be good at all of them. Look at what skills your current and future projects are demanding and then upskill in those areas. Chances are your team already possesses an aptitude that just needs to be encouraged or recognized.

Lead your Team in Continued Learning

Instructional designers are some of the most curious people you'll meet. They love to learn new things; that's why they're in this business. Creating a culture where everyone works together, brainstorms, and shares ideas is the ideal setting for instructional designers.

One idea is to host "show and tell" sessions, which support team learning. The team can show each other what they're working on or one new thing they learned. It's natural to be proud of your work; too often, we race off to the next project. Sharing projects creates a sense of team pride and fosters collaboration. They'll be more likely to ask each other for help solving an issue if they remember an expert skill someone demonstrated to the team.

Another great idea, although it isn't always possible, is to allow for some whitespace time. Allow yourself and your team the time to explore something new, maybe to cycle back and improve a previous project or develop a skill you may need in the future. These do not always have to be related to current work, but they do pay off down the road in lessons learned or better skills that make future projects easier.

The role of a learning leader is not merely to direct but to create avenues for innovation by clearing obstacles. Providing time for exploration, ensuring access to adequate tools, and facilitating training empowers the team to spearhead innovation in instructional design practices. Certainly, it is also helpful to send along an interesting article, podcast, or video, something you learned from a conference or saw from a competitor, especially since it's your job to have your eyes at that horizon level. But chances are, if you sit down and have a good discussion with your team, you'll find out they've already considered these things and have some great ideas!

While a deep understanding of instructional design is not mandatory for a learning leader, a keen awareness and openness to learning can amplify our leadership effectiveness. By supporting the team and fostering an environment conducive to creativity and innovation, we can drive meaningful change and prepare our workforce to succeed in their next learning challenges.





CHAPTER #3

LEARNING LEADER AS A FUTURE-FOR- WARD INNOVATOR

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A CORPORATE LEARNING
LEADER TO BE AN INNOVATOR WHO CAN SEE AROUND
CORNERS?

The expression “see around corners” has existed for a long time. People who have this ability can usually see things coming before the rest of us. They have

a strong sense of anticipation about the things to come.

Of course, this doesn’t mean they are always right. But they are constantly looking for challenges they see coming and opportunities they want to take advantage of. This impacts their strategic planning. People don’t usually create strategic plans to keep things as they are. Forward thinking done well ensures that the organization’s workforce is equipped with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities necessary to remain competitive in the industry.

**How can L&D leaders
develop this foresight?**

The temptation is to assume that people are born this way, and there may be some truth. However, every L&D leader can work to improve their foresight.

Observe and Anticipate Industry Trends

What should a learning leader be watching for? In the corporate L&D setting, there are at least three things. The first is to carefully observe and anticipate industry trends. Not only benchmarking what competitors have been doing, but what are they branching into?

Who are the forward thinkers, and what are they seeing and saying? Attend conferences, read papers, and stay informed by networking with others. Data analysis is also a big part of becoming a futurist, as it allows one to see emerging trends and patterns. Of course, that means having access to the right data

and time to do the analysis. Finally, it is a good time to build strong relationships with other leaders within your organization. What does the VP of Operations see in their area? How is marketing changing in the face of ever-expanding social media? What is R&D working on, and what skills might be needed to bring it to market?

Keep Informed of Tehcnological Advances

The second way to become a futurist is to pay careful attention to technological advances. Artificial intelligence is sucking up all the oxygen in the room right now, for good reason, but where is it heading? L&D leaders should consider how AI will change what jobs we have and how we will do them. What AI skills will be needed in our workforce? What might our workforce look like in five to ten years? There are no clear answers to these questions at this point, but they are questions we need to be asking now and with a great deal of intentionality.

For the immediate future, investment in technology and the training needed to use it well is a priority. For instance, a hodgepodge approach to AI with everyone doing their own thing will not produce good results.

Standards need to be created, and training should be made available. Working groups can share what they are reading, learning, and focusing on, both the threats and the opportunities.

Watch for Changing Workforce Needs

The third is changing workforce needs. Baby boomers are moving quickly into retirement. Job requirements are constantly in flux. Companies are more competitive than ever, so employers must upskill quickly and provide opportunities for their current workforce while attracting new talent. One way that L&D leaders can meet changing needs is by building a culture of continuous learning.

Now more than ever, lifelong learning is a base requirement for all employees. Learning strategy should include a variety of creative and interesting ways for people to learn both on their own and with others in their circles.

These three are certainly impacting organizations' L&D strategies. Companies will highly value people who investigate each trend and its future.

What are the potential challenges of trying to predict the future?

The most obvious challenge is simply being wrong, which is, of course, going to happen. Predicting the future is inherently uncertain. As L&D leaders, we have to be prepared to adapt our strategies as circumstances change.

Another is putting all your eggs in one basket, which means being so sure that one thing will happen that you ignore all the other possibilities. This is easily done because we can become fascinated by something we think will happen, and when it doesn't, we cannot pivot to what is actually happening.

A third is that being so focused on the future that the present is ignored. Being able to see around corners is not an ivory tower exercise. All of us have daily tasks we need to accomplish to keep moving forward in our organizations. The future cannot be brought in at the expense of the needs of the present.

The ultimate goal of a forward-thinking L&D leader is to create a workforce that is agile, adaptable, and prepared for the challenges of the future that have not yet arrived but are coming. By anticipating future trends and developing innovative L&D strategies, L&D leaders can help their organizations thrive in the future.



CHAPTER #4

LEARNING LEADER AS A FINANCIAL STRATEGIST

The traditional image of the Learning & Development leader often meant facilitators, trainers, and curriculum designers. The roles were clearly defined, as were the expectations. Learning teams built learning experiences. But these roles have evolved in recent years.

L&D professionals are no longer just creating and delivering training programs; we have become strategic business partners. We need to demonstrate the value we bring to the organization, which means understanding the bottom line. Our work now has a stronger financial component, and our relationship with the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) might be the most important one we have.

Before we get to the skills we need, let's begin with the perspective of the CFO. Dr. Keith Keating, the Chief Learning Officer of BDO Canada, has given our industry a gift in his dissertation, *Exploring the Beliefs about Training in Organizations*:

A Perspective from Chief Financial Officers. Exploring the Beliefs about Training in Organizations: A Perspective from Chief Financial Officers - ProQuest. I have read this several times, and Keith's insights are impressive.

A Summary of Keith Keating's Thoughts

1. First, CFOs acknowledged employees are an organization's most important asset, and CFOs identified that training could produce numerous benefits, including those that support the employee and the organization.
2. Conversely, the second finding was that CFOs overlook the concrete value that results from training.
3. As the third finding indicated, for CFOs to better realize the value of training, CFOs need clearer measurement metrics and reporting processes.

4. To enable improved measurement and reporting, the fourth theme identified an overwhelming opportunity to bridge the relationship gap between CFOs and the Training function. This data can be leveraged by the Training function to strengthen the relationship with CFOs, leading to an increased awareness of the beliefs about training, opportunities for greater investment in training for continued employee growth and development, and stronger organizational performance. After all, CFOs and the Training function ultimately work toward the same goal: creating value for the organization.

So, CFOs know L&D is important but don't necessarily know why or how. We need better metrics, which means there is a great opportunity for learning leaders to help them bridge the gap. It goes beyond simply managing budgets. Learning leaders must become proficient in financial analysis, understand key performance indicators, and measure the ROI of their programs. This includes quantifying both hard and soft benefits. Hard benefits are easier to measure—things like increased productivity, reduced turnover, and improved customer satisfaction. However, we must also demonstrate the value of softer outcomes, such as improved morale, increased innovation, and enhanced employee well-being.

How do you communicate the value of L&D programs to stakeholders, especially those focused on the bottom line, like the CFO?

That's a key challenge. We must translate L&D outcomes into business terms that resonate with executives. In some sense, we should learn what they need and help them get it. We must be able to tell a compelling story about how our programs contribute to the organization's success. For example, we might demonstrate how a specific training program led to a significant increase in sales, improved customer satisfaction scores, or reduced employee attrition. Using data visualization tools and clear, concise reports helps to effectively communicate our impact.

How has this focus on financial acumen impacted the role of the L&D leader?

It means we are becoming more strategic and data-driven leaders. We are constantly looking for ways to improve the ROI of our programs and demonstrate the value of L&D to the organization. It will force us to build stronger relationships with other departments, particularly finance and operations. By understanding their needs and priorities, we can better align our L&D strategies with the overall business objectives.

What are some of the challenges in demonstrating the financial value of L&D?

One of the biggest challenges is quantifying the soft benefits of training. How do you put a dollar value on improved morale or increased creativity? We must find innovative ways to measure

and demonstrate these intangible benefits. Another challenge is staying ahead of the curve. The business landscape is quickly changing, and we continuously adapt our strategies and metrics to reflect these changes. For example, the rise of AI and automation will undoubtedly impact the skills required by our workforce, and we must be ready to adapt our training programs accordingly. Simply having AI tools will not be enough. Training learners when and how to use the tools will be required. We must stay ahead while also connecting back to the value we bring.

One good piece of advice for aspiring L&D leaders is to embrace data, develop strong analytical skills, build strong relationships with key stakeholders, and, most importantly, never stop learning. The field of L&D is constantly evolving, and we need to adapt and grow continuously to remain effective. By embracing our role as financial stewards, L&D professionals can elevate our impact, demonstrate the value of our work, and drive organizational success in the years to come.





CHAPTER #5

LEARNING LEADERS AS A GUIDE IN LOCALIZATION

As discussed in this ebook, success as a learning leader requires many skills, tools, and responsibilities. One such responsibility of learning leaders in a global organization is overseeing the localization and translation of all learning materials. Effective learning initiatives resonate with their intended audiences. For global organizations, this means that materials must be accurate across various locations and culturally appropriate to those involved. A learning leader can drive global learning engagement and effectiveness by catering to the cultural learning preferences of their learners.

Why Localization and Translation Matter

Before jumping into the practical steps, let's understand the significance of localization and translation. These processes help ensure that content speaks directly

to the audience and that the materials achieve the desired impact on the learners. A training module that works well in one region might fall flat in another if its creators don't consider local-specific factors. Imagine momentarily how a metal fabricator in Iowa might have different learning needs than a Manhattan bioengineer. The culture of the learner matters! The goal of developing globally relevant content is that every employee, whether sitting in Toronto or Tokyo, receives the same quality of learning experience.

Think Global from the Start with a Diverse Team

So, what strategies can a learning leader use to effectively reach each of your intended learners? You can start by building a development team, SMEs, and/or vendors who reflect the diversity of your specific global audience. Involving members from representative cultural backgrounds provides valuable perspective and insight. As your team begins to plan the content,

before the storyboard, give them space to brainstorm regarding its global reach. What learning preferences does the audience share? Would they learn this content better in a small group or alone on a computer? Approach content creation with an international lens so that you plan for translation, localization, and potential cultural adjustments from the onset before you outline the content.

Document Cultural Nuances, Quirks, and Preferences

Next, as you dive into scripting materials, ensure your team carefully avoids idioms or metaphors that don't translate easily. Keep sentences clear and concise to facilitate translation. Use examples that your global audience can relate to. If this task is too large because the examples and needs are too varied, consider creating multiple scenarios and allow the learner to choose the one that is customized for them. And if your favorite content writer loves to use the phrase diving in to motivate English speakers, you may want to grab a different approach, as this idiom doesn't fly well in other languages. (Do you see what we did there?)

Understand that graphics, roles, scenarios, and colors carry different meanings—or evoke different emotions—across cultures. Be proactive and ask your audience how your storyboards and mockups make them feel. Is that red banner offensive? Are the images representative without being demeaning? Do the example situations ring true to their location?

Build a file that houses the results of your research on these and other cultural norms, idioms, and sensitivities to avoid. It's crucial to respect these differences to create inclusive learning materials.

Leverage Technology and Tools

Don't be reluctant to use technology to your advantage. Employ internal translation

management systems (TMS) or choose vendors carefully who use TMSs to automate and streamline translation workflows. In addition to TMSs, look for authoring tools that support multilingual content and collaborate with professional translation and localization services to ensure accuracy and cultural appropriateness.


Incorporate Feedback Loops

After your learning initiatives are launched, regularly gather and incorporate feedback from global teams to continuously improve. This strengthens the content and promotes a culture of continuous learning. Your audience will feel respected and heard as you build a global community.

Align Global Training and Development with Company Goals

Finally, remember to align your localization and translation efforts with your organization's overall training and development strategy. Ensure that learning initiatives support the company's goals and enhance employees' competencies worldwide. Localization and translation can greatly impact the value of a training initiative, either positively or negatively. For those top-priority endeavors, don't cut corners on localization. Making the content relevant to your various global audiences is the main event.

Successfully leading a global learning team requires more than just an understanding of learning science or design. It demands a comprehensive localization and translation strategy, including a strong process, a diverse team, and helpful tools. By following these key strategies, learning leaders can create impactful learning experiences that transcend geographical boundaries and foster a truly global mindset within their organizations. Learning leaders can enhance their initiatives' effectiveness and champion a culturally diverse and inclusive learning environment, building a strong global community.



CHAPTER #6

LEARNING LEADER AS A SERVANT LEADER

As we progress with our eBook, **“Learning Leader As...,”** we explore a transformative yet timeless approach to leadership. While many perceive servant leadership simply as a leadership style, its impact on the Learning and Development (L&D) sector is both profound and multifaceted. This chapter delves into how servant leaders can drive innovation and success across the organization by prioritizing the growth and well-being of others.

The concept of servant leadership is not new; however, its definition and core principles take on a distinct perspective within the Learning and Development world.

First, let’s define servant leadership as leading by serving others, empowering and uplifting individuals to help them achieve their best.

In learning and development, this means prioritizing the growth and well-being of my organization, the learners within it, and my team members. It means fostering an environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This kind of thinking is core to our makeup as learning leaders. We want people to grow and learn so that they can improve their lives and the lives of those around them. Servant leadership enables that.

What servant leadership strategies can we use to empower our team members?

Consider applying these principles by transitioning from

being the primary authority for your team to a supportive facilitator. This journey starts by focusing on the growth and development of each team member. Make it a priority to actively listen to their individual goals and aspirations, enabling you to customize development opportunities that align with their career goals.

It’s always a joy to get to know team members more and discover their gifts and abilities, and where they want to develop. Try to keep their interests in mind as new projects surface. Match up the appropriate team members and their gifts with projects suitable for them. Or pair someone looking to grow in an area with someone more experienced.



It doesn't always work perfectly, but if we aim to enhance morale and cultivate a more engaged and productive team, ensuring everyone has the resources and support they need to succeed will go a long way. This method nurtures an environment where innovation and learning are at the forefront.

What are examples of applying servant leadership principles to serve our learners?

Serving the learners within our organizations can take several forms, so let's look at three examples of how these leadership principles can be applied.

An Active Collaborative Needs Assessment and Curriculum Design Process

When we involve employees from various levels to contribute insights into a training initiative, we ensure the content is relevant and impactful. This participatory approach reflects servant leadership by respecting and integrating diverse perspectives. It might sound cliché, but listening to



the various stakeholders and helping them get at the root of the problem is a way to serve them.

Because we serve a global audience, an extension of this thinking is that we take very seriously the diverse perspectives of our learners around the globe. Learning to make small or sometimes large tweaks in our content, images, audio, etc., makes a big difference for our global learners. Helping them see "themselves" in the learning experience is a way to serve them.

A Variety of Communication Channels for Learners

Offer multiple avenues for learners to provide feedback in a way that suits them best, such as through email, anonymous surveys, discussion forums, or online chat areas. When there is time and budget, we also host small live discussion groups. We encourage our learners to express their thoughts freely by fostering a supportive and open environment where feedback is valued and respected. None of these suggestions will make any difference unless our team regularly reviews these channels, acknowledges receipt of feedback, and transparently communicates how we plan to address their suggestions. Once our learners recognize that you're truly listening, you'll build trust, and they'll share more honestly.

Ongoing Continuous Improvement by Listening to and Incorporating Our Learners' Feedback

For critical initiatives, our team schedules dedicated feedback sessions with learners, both individually and in groups. During these sessions, we employ active listening techniques such as paraphrasing what the learner has said to confirm understanding, asking open-ended questions to encourage deeper discussion, and using non-verbal cues like nodding to show engagement. An important part of this is to document the feedback received and make actionable plans

to incorporate it into the learning design, ensuring that learners can see the influence of their input in future iterations.

How might servant leadership impact your organization?

Servant leadership helps create an environment where open communication is encouraged, mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, and everyone feels responsible for each other's growth, which is essential in building a sustainable learning culture.

Servant leadership, however, is not without its challenges. In fact, servant leadership is often criticized as not meeting the organization's needs. It's a claim that the constant focus on serving others might divert attention from the organization's overall goals and strategic direction, potentially compromising long-term effectiveness. To address this, I've learned to align both by clearly communicating how personal development contributes to broader company goals. When we're all aligned to organizational goals, and we've developed training and development pointed to them, there is no diversion of attention or focus.

Another common criticism or challenge in servant leadership is the perception that it slows everything down, that it's decision-making by committee. In my experience, this isn't the case at all. Servant leaders listen to team members' feedback and alternate views, but they're not afraid to make a decisive and sometimes quick decision. In fact, I would argue that your team and the larger organization will appreciate that. Critics of servant leadership often argue that these leaders won't make hard decisions, but again, I would argue the opposite. I have often made hard decisions. Suppose the team has been listened to and understands the "why," they will respect the decision. It doesn't always mean everyone is happy, but they respect the leader and how the decision was made.

In conclusion, servant leadership within the L&D framework creates an environment ripe for learning, growth, and innovation. Leaders can foster a collaborative culture that empowers everyone involved by aligning personal and organizational goals and actively engaging with team members and learners. Through servant leadership, learning leaders can play a pivotal role in transforming lives, thereby contributing to a dynamic and successful organization.



CHAPTER #7

LEARNING LEADER AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL AGENT



The term transformer may not be one you have used to describe yourself, but the concept is not new to our role as learning leaders. Upskilling our organization's workforce, improving our learning culture, and continually helping our team adapt to new challenges are the crux of our job. Whether you've considered it or not, learning leaders are in the business of transformation.

So, transformers, how do we carry out this calling to produce significant change in others?

Let's look at three key areas where a learning leader needs to assess potential transformational changes. These key areas are learning goals, learning methods, and the learning department or team.

Transforming Learning Goals

Traditionally, our industry has been guilty of focusing only on job-specific skills—training our workforce to perform a certain task that is required for a particular job. A transformational shift requires a broader emphasis on mindsets and capabilities such as curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation. The rapid pace of change in today's business environment demands adaptability and agility. A narrow focus on job-specific skills isn't sufficient for long-term success. What happens when a problem needs to be solved? Or what is the impact on innovation if we don't encourage deeper-level thinking? Instead, it's important to prioritize a fully human approach, encouraging our learners to think for themselves. These capabilities enable employees to navigate ambiguity, change, and continuously learn.



Implementing this shift begins with cultivating a team culture that values comprehensive learning objectives beyond mere skills. Hiring decisions should favor individuals whose backgrounds nurture a worldview that looks beyond traditional skill sets. Do your learning team members consider the whole person when they design learning objectives? This becomes a huge part of the team's culture.

The next step is to embed this whole-person philosophy into your needs analysis with any group you're providing training for. Develop the vocabulary and a list of questions to find solutions for each learning problem:

1. What pre-knowledge does the learner need to perform this task?

2. Is there something they must unlearn first?

3. Is there knowledge that needs to be scaffolded? This is especially true with complex technical skills.

4. Do we need to increase the learner's buy-in to what they are learning? Do they value the content? What are their suppositional beliefs?

5. Are there organizational issues that could hinder the task from being completed correctly? For example, lack of time, lack of motivation, or lack of leadership support.

When you categorize your learning objectives into what the learner must know, do, and believe, you

transform your initiatives from strictly skills-based to involving the whole person.

For example, you may not be very effective in safety training if the learner doesn't view the safety threat as real. Sharing the stories of their peers is an effective way to bridge that gap. Knowledge, values, and behavior may not change if you haven't designed your initiatives to address all three. We work hard to uncover the main objectives in each area, and our initiatives are more effective because of it.

From there, we work to develop the learning strategies and delivery methods. Here are a few examples.

If the focus of the training is knowledge acquisition and retention, then we will employ a typical approach, such as delivering chunked content in an eLearning, job aid, or other digital format where the knowledge can be assessed and corrected over time.

Focusing on skill acquisition or upskilling may require some foundational knowledge but quickly moves to practical application. These types of strategies are hands-on. We incorporate virtual or IRL practice, coaching, and, finally, evaluation over time to ensure that the skills are still being practiced successfully. There may also be scenario practice or role-play.

Attitude acquisition or value change is always the hardest and occurs over the longest period. Incorporating stories with an emotional appeal, scenario-based learning, social learning, coaching, and other strategies ensures that

beliefs change and that they are supported in that change by the community around them.

Transforming Learning Methods

Even within the past five years, we've seen a massive transformation in the technology available to a learning professional. We've also seen an increased understanding of the principles of learning science. What we have available now allows us to design using a multifaceted blended learning approach that combines digital instruction with hands-on experiences, peer-to-peer learning or social learning, and coaching. We can also integrate microlearning modules, game elements, and even various types of simulations. These elements make the learning process more engaging, interactive, and directly relevant to the tasks and challenges learners face in their roles. They're also far more "sticky," meaning learners retain the necessary skills, knowledge, or attitudes needed.

Designing learning experiences is an exciting and very creative exercise. But it also becomes more complex with new modern challenges. For example, one challenge is ensuring that employees have the necessary digital skills to engage in online learning. One great solution we've found is to foster a culture of peer learning and knowledge sharing within the organization. Establishing online communities of practice, implementing formal mentoring programs, and recognizing and rewarding employees who actively share their knowledge and expertise with

their colleagues is a powerful way to do this. Peer learning can be informal, as well. We've used wikis or shared docs where employees have added their own instructions, explainer videos, job aids, or other recommendations, and the entire organization benefits.

Transforming Learning Departments

For a learning leader, reshaping the learning department to meet contemporary demands starts with building strong partnerships with their organization's business leaders to understand their strategic needs. Consider that your CFO is asking for an accounting simulation—you may need to ensure your L&D team can deliver what is required. Aligning learning initiatives with business objectives allows the L&D team to develop targeted capabilities.

The key for the team is that they all understand the entire ecosystem of learning experience design. When the whole team understands all the delivery options we've discussed and has a solid foundation of learning science to implement a fitting solution, it changes everything. Encouraging adaptation and experimentation is critical. Encourage your team to experiment with AI, learn how to curate content, and think outside the box for design. This fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement within your own department.

Your leadership and vision can truly shape the



future of workplace learning. Leaders who transform focus on comprehensive learning goals, embrace cutting-edge methods, and foster a collaborative learning environment. And with you in the transformer role model, you will show your team that you personally are committed to learning and growing. These steps can ensure that your organization remains adaptable and well-prepared for future challenges.

Conclusion

In concluding this exploration of the dynamic learning leader, it's evident that the most effective leaders embrace a blend of strategic vision and genuine passion for people development. The ability to anticipate change, demonstrate value, foster innovation, and cultivate inclusive learning environments is paramount. Learning leaders who prioritize organizational objectives and individuals' growth and well-being are well-positioned to drive meaningful transformation. By committing to continuous improvement, building strong relationships, and embracing the evolving nature of the field, learning leaders can make a lasting impact, shaping both individual lives and organizational success.

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