How to develop a modern digital learning strategy

The step-by-step guide to delivering real business impact
On average, organizations use 19 different learning technologies and spend 18% of L&D budgets on digital. The impact of Covid-19 means we can expect this percentage to continually increase over the next few years. Many organisations that initially planned for temporary digital training options - such as moving all their classroom training to Zoom or Teams calls - are now recognising that permanent digital transformation is required. And they’re looking for the technologies and techniques to do it properly.

Why do some of these organizations drive real impact and ROI from their digital learning strategies, while others fail to reap the returns? This best practice guide will help you develop the digital aspect of your corporate learning and development strategy to deliver real business impact.

A digital learning strategy isn’t just about the success of an individual project. It’s also about looking at smart ways to produce elearning at scale, often with dispersed teams. This guide sets out the steps you can take for successful online learning.

“Many organizations start their digital learning initiative with expectations similar to, ‘We have 50,000 hours of learning for all our employees! Can you imagine the impact this initiative will have?!’ However, such a broad initiative often lacks focus and strategy. One year later, the utilization rate for noncompliance courses is often below 10%. After all, just because your local library has 10,000 books doesn’t mean you will read all of them—or even go to the library.’”

Centre for Creative Leadership: ‘6 strategies for digital learning success’

Make your digital learning the go-to place for answers and learning in your organization, time and time again. Drive up user engagement, reach, reuse and, of course, the impact of your digital learning on business performance and productivity by reading on.

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In a nutshell, a digital learning and development strategy is about shaping the way your organization uses digital learning in all its forms. This can range from blogs and videos to webinars and online collaboration through to online courses, immersive experiences and resources. The aim is always to help employees learn new skills, enhance their performance or develop themselves for the future.

“Digital Learning does not mean learning on your phone, it means ‘bringing learning to where employees are.’ It is a ‘way of learning’ not a ‘type of learning.’”

The Power of Collaborative Learning: Josh Bersin

A modern digital learning and development strategy...

1. Strives to help digitally overwhelmed and busy people improve their performance where and when it matters with the very best, carefully selected experiences and resources available (not all of the content available on a topic!).

2. Empowers end users to use digital learning content flexibly - when they want, on the device they want, and how they want. For example, a video might not always be right for them, or be a good choice in that moment when a one-page guide will do.

3. Requires critically reviewing the performance of every learning platform. Are they delivering ROI and the desired results to support the business strategy? There might be another platform altogether that’s being used by employees to connect, share and learn - is your strategy missing a trick?

4. Needs to work now and in the future, and that means it needs to be measured, adaptable and iterative.
How digital fits in your wider learning and development strategy

Digital learning rarely exists on its own. The majority of organizations make use of a range of learning and development methodologies including digital, in-person, synchronous and asynchronous offers. This is called a blended learning strategy. For example, one initiative might be made up of a video teaser followed by an elearning course, supported by a team meeting on Zoom and a one-to-one coaching session with a manager.

Successful organisations think holistically about their overarching L&D blend first, considering which methodologies drive the best results in different places. This enables them to focus on the role digital learning plays in that blend. So whether you’re reviewing your employee training program or shifting from classroom to digital for the first time, a blended learning strategy can help!

Top tips for getting started with blended learning

1. Have a clear list of the benefits different modes of learning offer - see below!

2. Revisit a previous project that was delivered either fully in the classroom or purely digitally. Map out an ideal blend as a conceptual experiment. Could you test this approach out?

3. Start testing some mini-blends out. Before your next virtual classroom based course, give participants a digital quiz or diagnostic to determine their prior knowledge. Also provide a digital follow-up afterwards, such as an elearning scenario to practice with. Measure the impact.

4. Review an online course and, as with above, assess what shouldn’t be there. What would be better to do as an online discussion or an assignment? Break it up into a digital blend - there’s lots of different shapes and sizes of digital learning to play with, after all.

5. Review a face-to-face session critically. The break from the classroom that Covid-19 gave us allows us to look at those courses with fresh eyes. What shouldn’t be there? What doesn’t lend itself to group learning? What would be better off as some personal, digital, training?

6. Involve your classroom trainers in your digital solution for the reasons spelled out by Towards Maturity in Digital: does evidence based learning and development matter.
Online learning vs face-to-face learning - What are the benefits of each?

The best blended learning and development strategies tap into the highest value opportunities offered by the different modes of learning, and don’t waste the opportunities presented. So, which mode is best for what?

Having a clear list of the benefits of digital vs synchronous group learning will help guide your team and strategy. Here are some tips.

5 benefits of **synchronous group learning**

1. **Conversation**: participants can discuss, share stories, ask questions.
2. **Collaboration**: participants can work together in real time on tasks and activities, and learn from one another.
3. **Can practice**: participants can try things out and talk to other people within the organization.
4. **Carry out roleplays**: test out conversation, presentation, facilitation and coaching skills, and get feedback from peers and experts.
5. **Coaching**: facilitators and experts can guide and coach participants, support them when needed, recap points or push them further as needed.

It’s worth noting that virtual classrooms, video conferences and online group work lends itself to many of the above.
To explore more about the importance of elearning, take a look at 10 benefits of elearning in the workplace and why successful training providers are embracing digital learning.

### 5 benefits of **digital learning**

1. **Empowering**: Opportunity for workplace learning and development is the #1 reason people want to work at an organization. Technology puts learning and development in the hands of your end users and can offer them freedom around how and when they use it.

2. **Measurable/Flexible**: with learning analytics available within most modern learning tools, digital learning enables you to track employee engagement with learning, shares, drop-off points, user comments and lots more.

3. **Connected**: xAPI learning technologies enable you to connect the dots between all kinds of resources, experiences and activities that make up an individual’s learning journey and guide them from one relevant piece to the next to make learning continuous.

4. **Always available**: people learn on the fly, in the moment, on their commute - basically when they can or when they want to. Digital learning is always on and can be delivered in bite-size pieces that allow it to be used flexibly.

5. **Personalized**: modern learning technologies enable you to produce personalized or adaptive learning solutions that target an individual’s role, needs and skills gaps, in their own localized

To explore more about the importance of elearning, take a look at 10 benefits of elearning in the workplace and why successful training providers are embracing digital learning.

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**Hear from successful L&D teams that are making the most of digital learning in their organizations.**

Click here

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**Debbie’s report**

You said your main weakness is:

I take on too much.

Getting stuck into details or failing to pull back and look at the big picture is a common time eater. Review what else you said...

You said that these are your other weaknesses:

- I get a buzz from working on a knife edge, I want to do everything myself.
- Yet described your ideal scenario to be:
  - Focussed time in the morning to work on larger tasks, with smaller jobs being completed in the afternoon.

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**Recommended for you**

A personalized report from an online diagnostic.
How to create a successful digital corporate learning and development strategy

Modern learners now actively seek digital answers to their questions and expect digital learning to be part of their workplace offering. And they’re likely to want to use their mobile device to do this.

So, how do you shape or modernize a successful digital learning strategy in your organization, where digital learning, in its many forms, meets the needs of the business and end users across your whole organization?

Is it possible to be people-centered and personal, yet produce online learning efficiently and at scale?

“96% of people turn to their phone in moments of need, and 76% of employees say that Google is their preferred choice for workplace learning. Modern online learning is sought after and expected.”

Explore these and many more stats on the profile of a modern learner.

Overall, an empowering approach rather than top down delivery helps your L&D strategy deliver more impact.

Traits of an effective digital learning strategy - L&D team dos and don’ts

- Identify performance needs by working with end users
- Speak to employees and experts to discover the most useful content and approaches for them
- Connect the dots between useful content that already exists
- Support people to work toward wider developmental goals by helping them navigate the most useful learning experiences

- Take a “top down” or content-led approach, ignoring your audience
- Take “orders” for training requests from senior leaders without challenge
- Push new content and courses out as a way to solve all problems - adding to employee overwhelm
- Think short term only, and in siloed, role-specific ways that disable talent from growing or moving roles
Successfully integrating digital learning into your corporate learning and development strategy is not easy. L&D teams in large organizations face huge variations in:

**Common challenges L&D teams face**

Successfully integrating digital learning into your corporate learning and development strategy is not easy. L&D teams in large organizations face huge variations in:

- Location and time zones of employees and their team
- User needs and expectations
- Business and customer requirements
- Language and culture
- Technology systems and habits
- Manager relationships and approaches
- Performance reviews and development planning
- What they are “told” is a learning priority by top leaders

This is why successful elearning strategies are never one size and shape, and include multiple goals and measures of success.
4 tips to developing a winning digital learning strategy

**Tip 1: Don’t start with learning technology**

While technology is at the heart of digital and modern workplace learning, don’t reach for new tools and platforms straight away. Technology in itself is not the (full) answer.

What not to do:

- Get software
- Spit out learning
- Add content
- Expect it to be used

“Over the last 5 years, investments in the digital agenda have been significant and organizations now use, on average, 19 different learning technologies and spend 18% of their L&D budgets on digital...What the evidence tells us is that learning technologies alone do not correlate to business or learning impact, however, the way they are used can dramatically accelerate the learning transformation.”

Digital - Does evidence-based L&D matter? Towards Maturity
5 reasons why your digital learning strategy should not start with technology

1. Effective learning starts with understanding key performance and employee challenges. Jumping into a specific tech option before shaping the problems could lead you down the wrong path.

2. Your employees are probably already using some tech platforms for learning - informally or formally. Think Teams, Slack, your Intranet. There could be a good reason not to break that habit.

3. Investments in learning technology do not directly affect learning impact - it's what you do with it that counts. Adding in yet more technologies can actually hinder productivity and usage, not boost it.

4. 90% of L&D teams don’t unearth the successes and failures of previous learning tech investments before they invest in others, according to the Towards Maturity Health Check. Seize the opportunity to learn before you expand.

5. You might not need new technology. Many modern xAPI-based digital learning platforms are able to knit together content and learning experiences held in different formats, in different places, and track and present individualized user journeys. It may be that you don’t need to move everything to a new place, but instead focus on the knitting together of your learning ecosystem.

“Recent developments in digital learning have been nurtured by a ‘people-centric web’ and by newer technologies that facilitate and stimulate collaborative conversations, knowledge-sharing, individualism and interpersonal networking – all of which should be at the heart of sophisticated L&D and HR strategies.”

Digital Learning Factsheet: CIPD

If you are in the market for new learning technologies - be it social learning platforms, learning experience platforms, learning management systems, learning content management systems, authoring software, curation tools and more - the first step is to put together your wish list of requirements by in-depth consultation.

You need to get to the heart of actual, typical or major performance challenges real employees face, why those challenges or barriers exist, and what would actually help them. You can do this by using learning analytics, user surveys and data around the use of previous tech alongside Design Thinking.

Explore more about available learning technologies and how to put together your buyer’s wish list with the Ultimate authoring buyers guide.
Tip 2: Consult

The average L&D team involves learning consumers in the design of their strategies and projects just 27% of the time. On the other hand, the most successful organizations were found to consult with their learners 97% of the time.

“It’s around not being order takers. It’s around looking at where the performance needs are inside of the business. That’s where we should be starting: that’s where everybody talks about we should be starting. It’s about getting an idea of what are the main challenges for people in their roles that stop them from being able to perform.”

Digital-first learning strategies, Learning at Large interview with Sam Taylor

Modern technology makes it super-easy to create, curate and share new courses and content. But should you?

Get close to the real problems
Effective modern learning and development teams shift their focus from “what can we produce” to “what is actually needed?” They do this by consulting with different areas of the business, with managers and employees, to uncover performance barriers and gaps that need dealing with.

Prioritize on key goals
Find five or less focus areas that will actually unblock productivity or performance for the business. Over a year, this will have a far greater effect than trying to deliver a solution to every “training need” you are told about by managers.

Use learning analytics
An effective digital learning and development strategy will also focus heavily on using learning analytics and having defined a goal. You should ideally be checking in on the progress of your strategy against that goal to get the product right.
“Don’t try and solve the problem 100 percent. Try and understand enough of the problem to make one step forward, and then measure where you are, and then re-evaluate, and then take the next step.”
Building a learning culture for 45,000 salespeople, Learning at Large interview with Paul Goundry

Carry out a learning technology audit

What is getting used for workplace performance support and development by employees? (Don't assume, but ask and observe!)

Is it what you expected?

How can you bolster that?

How can you streamline any disjointed parts of people's exploration of “digital learning” in your organization?

What opportunities can you see in the current picture that help bring learning into the workflow?

Case study: How data-driven elearning created growth and widened reach
An effective modern L&D team who already has a lot of digital learning content out there will take the time to clear out the clutter. Old courses that are out of date and don't work across devices will drag down the user experience, damage the reputation of your digital learning content and do more harm than good. Even if the content itself is valid.

**Tip 3: Cull and consolidate content**

If you have 23 available resources to help someone meet a specific performance goal:

- Pick out the best (use analytics to help you)
- Promote those above all
- Ensure all content is simply and clearly labelled
- Make sure learners can hop from one piece to the next easily, as they want (think learning technology ecosystem)
- Filter for different roles and levels of experience
Tip 4: Curate and socialize learning

A popular word in L&D land, “curate” became a recent new buzzword. But do some jump onto the idea of curating content rather than creating it because it’s seemingly cheaper? Many in L&D do it because it’s more user-friendly.

L&D professionals can help curate together useful digital experiences, discussion points, and performance support resources that relate to a given topic or goal and ensure learners can connect the dots to easily access them, through technology.

Grassroots or ground-up learning

A modern workplace digital learning ecosystem sees employees sharing and liking resources from outside and inside the organization, content that’s ground-up and content that’s formally been created. Smart L&D teams will actively enable and support ground-up approaches and the socialization or sharing of learning, in any form.

As part of your L&D strategy, you should find a way to support and utilize this social and grassroots movement without killing it. And that goes back to consulting - paying attention to what goes on, where - and building on that.

“Partnering with Elucidat experts was the best investment SGS could make. It allowed our team to discover the “digital learning designers” in them. The partnership allowed them to create and deliver with speed.”

Find out how SGS empowered technical experts within their business to share their expertise by creating digital learning.
The key to an effective digital corporate learning and development strategy is a blended approach based on user-centered research. Digging into your employees' current habits, needs, trends and opportunities will help your team set up a strategy for success now and in the future.

Digital learning has many benefits for the modern workplace. It doesn't require large groups of people to be in one physical space working at the same pace. Instead, it prioritizes flexibility, personalisation and learning in the flow of work. As the ripples of Covid-19 continue to accelerate digital transformation across the world, it's time to make sure digital is at the heart of your blended learning strategy.

As you implement your strategy, make the most of learning analytics to learn what's working and what you can iterate. Keep your ears to the ground and your eyes on the impact and your digital learning strategy will take off!

Summary

Back up your strategy with the right tools for the job

From transitioning your authoring team to Elucidat, to making big project releases go smoothly, we’ll make sure your elearning is a huge success – both for your team and your learners.

Book a free tailored demo today to see how Elucidat can help you to produce digital learning that delivers a transformational impact, as well as developing an effective online learning strategy.
Useful resources

‘6 strategies for digital learning success’
- Centre for Creative Leadership

People-Centered Learning. The modern learning manager’s strategic guide to deliver maximum value
- Elucidat

The Power of Collaborative Learning
- Josh Bersin

Digital: does evidence based learning and development matter
- Towards Maturity

Learning At Large Podcast
- Elucidat

Customer stories
- Elucidat

Digital Learning Factsheet
- CIPD

The ultimate authoring tools buyers guide
- Elucidat