DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN STRATEGY-DRIVEN LEARNING CULTURE

Learning Built With a Purpose to Engage Learners

VALAMIS

About This Workbook

The constant need for change and adaptation in the business world creates heavy demands on corporate learning and building a learning culture. How can L&D departments consistently solve these challenges with people skills and competencies when we are in an everlasting state of change?

Traditional, formal learning is no longer enough, and there is a need for more agile ways of developing and finding learning assets. By growing an engaging learning culture and providing accessible learning for every employee at their particular time of need, companies can help employees embrace a growth mindset and ensure their organisational agility and adaptability.

Even though companies benefit from the results of a successful and continuous learning culture, harnessing a new learning culture or supporting an existing culture can come with many new challenges and possible pitfalls. Implementing new learning tools, teaching people to use them, and encouraging learning new habits can make the learning process complex and difficult to communicate within the organisation.

Directing behavioural change and creating a growth mindset is crucial to a successful learning culture transformation. By involving everyone in the development process from the first steps, you are more likely to get your learning programs running smoothly and faster.

In this workbook, we put together tips to help you develop your organisation's learning culture. We used research, our own learning culture, and experiences with our clients to help you choose the right tools to implement change, along with tips to get your learners interested in the learning experience.

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Key Concepts

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people within the workplace "based on a strongly held and widely shared set of beliefs that are supported by strategy and structure".[1]

Growth Mindset

According to Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is a state of mind where people are open to developing their skills.[2] It is a mindset in which people believe that their abilities can be developed, and see challenges as possibilities to learn new things instead of seeing them as obstacles.

Continuous Learning

Continuous learning is the on-going process of learning new skills. This process can come in many forms: from taking formal courses to informal social learning. It involves self-initiative and taking on challenges. Continuous learning can also be within an organisation or personal, such as in lifelong learning.[3]

Learning Culture

As defined by CEB, learning culture is "a culture that supports an open mindset, an independent quest for knowledge, and shared learning directed toward the mission and goals of the organisation".[4] Having a growth mindset is a crucial part of a thriving learning culture.

Marketing and Communication

Marketing and communication are about getting your message across to the desired audience.

Why Do You Need a Learning Culture?

In the book, Adaptation Advantage (2020), McGowan and Shirpley state that "this exact moment in time, right now, is the slowest rate of change you will experience ever again".

The evolving technology and changing circumstances are creating vast opportunities for companies who are ready to embrace the change. McGowan and Shirpley suggest that every company and employee alike need to adopt learning as a skill to help make the most out of the future.[5] Or, as Bersin and associates said on 2010: "organisations with a strong learning culture significantly outperform their peers".[6] A growth mindset is needed in order to thrive. Organisations can and should help individuals in building their growth mindset. Creating an environment that supports learning and growth is critical to success.

Johan Skoglöf, Business Transformation Consultant at Future Learning Organisation in Sweden, has over 25 years of experience working with Ericsson, Volvo, and Scania to create successful learning cultures. Skoglöf suggests that a strong learning culture encourages and rewards experimentation, gives employees influence over their work and learning, helps people see mistakes as learning opportunities, and encourages reflection.[7] In other words, the culture supports an individual's growth mindset and protects psychological safety within the organisation.

Motivation alone is not enough to make the learning culture thrive. Skoglöf mentions that in order to get management and employees onboard for organisational change, we need to find a purpose that can engage and create a desire for change.[7]

Know Where You Are Going

Before you know where to take your learning culture, you need to truly understand your company's strategy: your business goals and how your learning will measurably impact those areas. All learning actions need to be connected to the organisation's strategy, not only to the learners' needs. Defining your learning strategy will help L&D justify their importance to the company and get the budget needed. You can look for inspiration for your learning culture from other organisations, but every company strategy and learning culture are different and unique.

Sam Moat, L&D Digital Lead at AlixPartners, spoke at a webinar with Valamis about learning culture transformation. According to Moat, when doing a transformation, everything needs to be tied to either the needs of the employees or the organisation's needs. It becomes crucial to understand who the people are in this equation, the challenges they face, and to tie that back with the organisation's strategy, challenges and opportunities. The conversation is the key.[8]

In creating a new learning culture or bringing in new learning tools to support your learning culture, your first questions to ask are not necessarily about learning at all. Start with asking what people need in their work and what challenges they are facing in their roles.

✎ EXERCISE

Get Connected

STEP 1 Where is the company going?

- Make sure you understand the company's strategy and the role L&D plays.
- Book meetings with management to find out where each department is heading. Make the conversation about business, avoid "L&D speak".

STEP 2 Think about what is driving change in your organisation.

- How do these forces affect different job roles? Who can help you understanding the change better?
- Now think about how these changes and driving forces are showing in your company culture. How about in the learning culture?

STEP 3 Who do you need to be chatting with to find out what stakeholders expect of the company's learning culture? What does success look like? How will you measure it? Report on it? Think carefully about the questions you are going to ask.
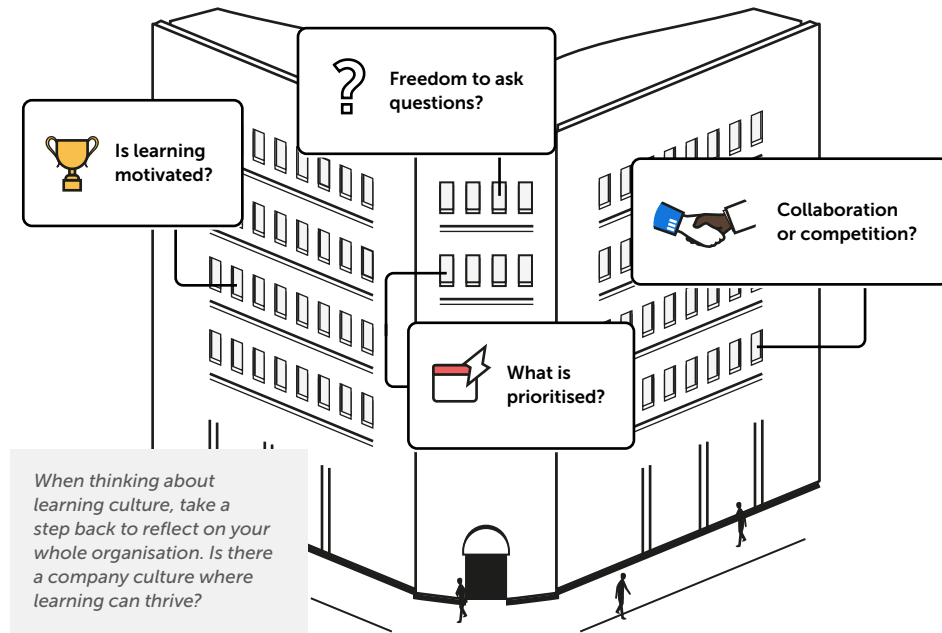
Some examples:

- What is learning to you? What does it mean?
- How do you learn? Do you learn in your work?
- What do you need in order to do your work successfully?
- What are the biggest challenges when it comes to learning?

What Is In Your Learning Culture?

Since you are reading this, you are probably looking to make some changes in your learning culture. Maybe you are looking to replace your digital learning solutions with something new. Or perhaps you are just trying to find new ways to work more efficiently and get people to learn.

Sam Moat, who drove a massive learning transformation at Alix Partners, reminds us that transformation is never about just one thing, but a combination of many:

> *"When we talk about transformation, we're talking not only about a technology change, but also cultural, system, and structural changes. Most importantly, it's about people."* —Sam Moat, L&D Digital Lead, AlixPartners[8]

Freedom to ask questions?

Is learning motivated?

Collaboration or competition?

What is prioritised?

When thinking about learning culture, take a step back to reflect on your whole organisation. Is there a company culture where learning can thrive?

Can Company Culture Influence Learning?

In the bigger picture, the company culture dictates whether your learning culture can thrive. Sometimes organisation culture can work against learning and sharing knowledge if it is too individualistic, focused on the short term or is too competitive. Changing any behaviour is not easy and sometimes intended changes in the company culture can remain quite distant from people's daily work.[9] How will company culture affect your work with learning culture?

Company culture can:

- Influence people competing against each other
- Encourage people to help others / ask for help
- Support psychological safety and freedom to question the status quo and innovate
- Motivate and incentivise learning

Analysing the Current State of Your Learning Culture

Once you have company culture covered, acknowledge the current state of your learning culture. Consider what learning looks like in your organisation at the moment. What kind of possibilities do you offer for learning? How do people like learning? Are people happy to help each other learn? Are they given enough resources for learning?
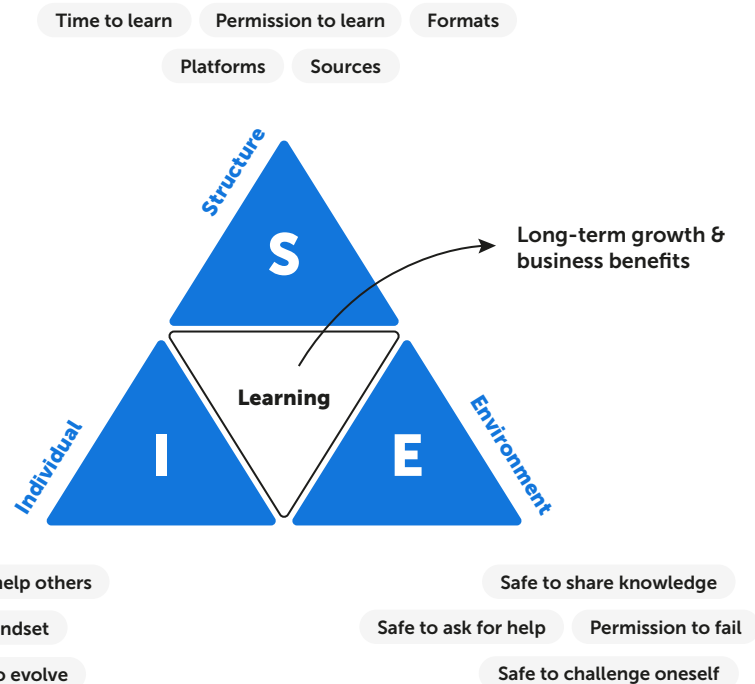
At Valamis, we believe most workplace learning happens informally through experiences in job-related situations and interactions with colleagues. We define formal learning as learning that is done on our learning platform, by reading books, or by attending courses. Informal learning can happen while working, or for example with a mentor or colleague's help. That is why it's important to embrace the growth mindset and reiterate the importance of reflection and helping others to develop.

How can you establish a culture where people are excited and feel free to learn and develop in their jobs? To encourage learning, make sure that structures and environments are programmed and individuals are supported.

But before you get started, find out where you are now.

Structure, Individual & Environment (SIE)

Choosing a framework to mirror your current learning culture can help in the beginning. This chart was built by Valamis' Human Resource Development Specialist, Riina Siikanen, in order to help develop your internal learning culture. The model was inspired by Wise Consulting's webinar about learning organizations[21] and the transformative learning theory by Jack Mezirow[22].

Time to learn   Permission to learn   Formats

Platforms   Sources

Willingness to help others

Growth mindset

Motivation to evolve

Safe to share knowledge

Safe to ask for help   Permission to fail

Safe to challenge oneself

Whatever learning approach takes place in your organisation, find out how you support learning in each area: structural, individual, and environmental levels. Analysing your learning culture from different perspectives can help you notice the strengths and weaknesses and even find out the possible learning obstacles.

Analysing the status of your learning culture helps you to not only notice the current pitfalls, but also to set the future goals. Using a model like this can help you to communicate the value of learning and L&D to your management and organisation. Also, it can help you to see how to use the L&D resources and budget, and on the other hand, what can prohibit you from success.

Structure

Structure refers to systems and processes that enable or inhibit the learning in your organisation. Structural variables can be related to time, resources, technologies, and rules that make your learning culture what it is. Surveys, including our Learning and Development in Organisations in 2020 survey, have proved that one of the biggest obstacles for learning is time.[10] Therefore, dedication to working time for learning can be one of the key factors in skill development.
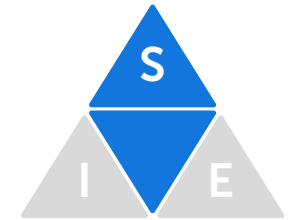
**Create time for learners by answering these questions:**

- How much time are employees using for learning each month?
- Do people share knowledge and help each other, or do they lack the time to do this?
- How much time can employees use to help others learn?
- Do managers give employees enough time to learn?
- How do you communicate that this is the time that they can take for learning?
- Should the learners communicate that they are not to be disturbed while they are learning?

Structure is not only about time. **Here are other valuable aspects to take into consideration:**

- Communicate where the learning can occur, whether it is your digital learning environment, learning from peers or any other format of learning your organisation offers.
- Introduce and offer instructions, frameworks and templates that will help people in helping others learn (e.g. sharing and passing knowledge in daily work, organisation's internal demos and presentations, mentoring junior employees, communities of practice).
- Always consider what is natural for your organisation and its current learning culture. Take small steps - change always takes time.
- Keep developing your methods, test new ways and be ready even to finish some programs and actions if they don't seem to work.
- Test microlearning to offer training that can be self-paced in short time periods.
- Make sure there are ways and structures for employees to get feedback.

Individual

From the individual's perspective, not having enough time to learn is the most significant barrier.[10] But even if an employee was given time to learn, all other duties come first, and the employee feels they don't have time to learn. How can you support individuals in their learning journey? How can you motivate them to prioritise learning?
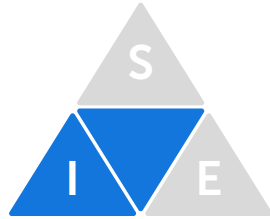
At Valamis, an employee's closest manager is the person who is in charge of supporting the individual's development. Understanding the employee's career ambitions and what motivates them is a good starting point. When a person knows their strengths and development areas, they will be able to define areas they can improve in order to succeed in their work. As L&D, you can support individuals best when communicating their career possibilities, and showing them that their improved skills can benefit the whole organisation.

Sometimes learning doesn't come from consumption; it comes from the creation.[11] Encourage people to share knowledge and create their learning materials, if possible. It does not only help others learn, but the creator to deepen their understanding on the subject.

Tools for supporting individuals' learning:

- Communicate and send reminders about the learning opportunities and expectations of learners.

- Motivate employees: tie the learning goals and activities to company strategy.

- Support managers and team leaders in aiding their team members (managers can support the learning for example, with development discussions, setting OKRs, regular 1-to-1 meetings, making sure that employees' values are aligned with their work, trying new processes, tools and ways of working).

- Assess whether the current employee learning support system is up to date and brings value to the employees: e.g. when is the last time the development discussion form updated?

- Consider conducting a survey to understand what motivates employees to learn.

Environment

After considering the structural and individual factors of your organisation's learning culture, it can be useful to think about the overall work environment, culture and mindset. Even though this part is visualized as one individual part in the SIE-model, it can also be understood as another level, which overlaps all other perspectives: How people act in relation to each other?
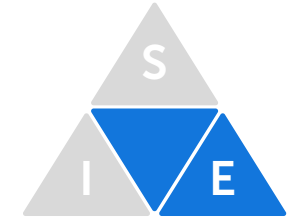
Understanding what kind of learning environment and the overall sentiment the organisation has regarding development can help you understand the obstacles you will face in implementing a learning culture.

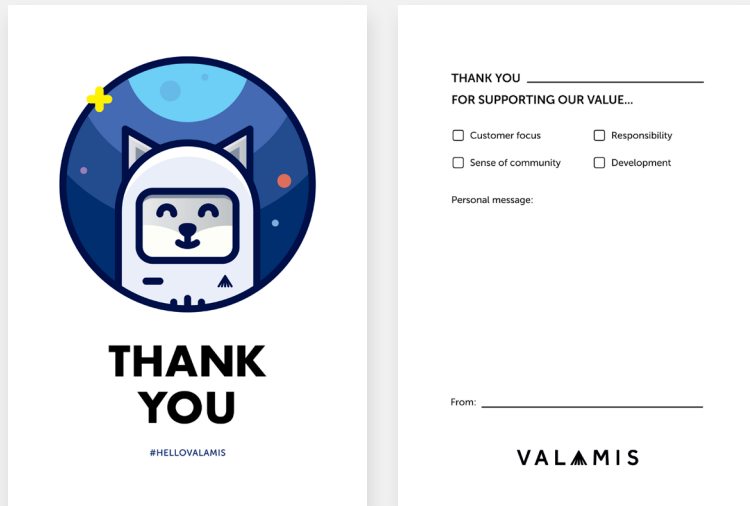**You can start with considering the following questions:**

- How does your organisation react to failures? Are they unspoken or embraced? Is it possible to learn from mistakes?

- Are people comfortable speaking up if they are not successful?

- Is development one of your organisation's core values?

- Would you say your organisation inspires the adoption of a growth mindset?

- Is the environment supportive of learning in general? What role does learning play in career development?

- Would you say your organisation is a psychologically safe place where people can ask and receive help and feedback openly and honestly without repercussion?

Example Use for the SIE Model:
Learn to Give Feedback

Define organisational level learning goals with management that align with the core values and purpose of the company. From there, structure goals to the work of specific teams and individuals. For example, after an internal employee pulse survey, an organisation found that its employees desired more feedback from their managers and teammates. One organisational level goal could be to develop in the area of encouraging feedback.

Structure: Create the learning materials in your learning environment. Offer tools, such as forms or templates, for giving feedback. Give time to learn. Suggest ways for giving feedback; for example at Valamis we offer post cards as a template that can be filled in and given to colleagues as a thank you.

THANK YOU
FOR SUPPORTING OUR VALUE...

☐ Customer focus   ☐ Responsibility
☐ Sense of community   ☐ Development

Personal message:

From: _____

VALAMIS

THANK YOU
#HELLOVALAMIS

Example of a "Thank You" card that employees can give to a colleague with a handwritten message. Positive feedback culture is encouraged at Valamis.

EXERCISE

Define Your Starting Point and Goals

STEP 1   What is your current organisational culture?

STEP 2   Where is your learning culture right now? Use the answers from your stakeholder interviews to paint the picture.

- Use the SIE model to find out where your learning culture is right now.
- How do people learn?
- What is working well, and what complaints do most people have?

STEP 3   Where do you want to take the learning culture?

- Use the SIE model to sketch a dream learning culture in your organisation. What would you create if you had no limitations at all?

STEP 4   Define your action points

- What do you need to move from the current situation to the "dream situation"? In which order?

Individual: Help individuals understand that they can give feedback and how to do it most constructively. Help them to reflect on how they perform as feedback givers and receivers. Self-reflection leads to learning.

Environment: Create a safe environment to give and receive feedback. This could be achieved by establishing a feedback session in weekly team meetings. Build an atmosphere of psychological safety that supports feedback.

The Challenges of Building a Learning Culture

"What could go wrong?" is an important question to ask when beginning a new venture. The question can help you predict and prepare for solving issues that can arise.
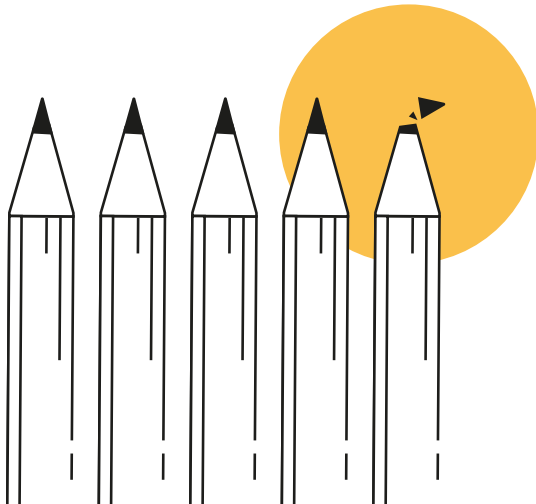
One of the major pitfalls in creating a new learning culture is not breaking from old learning habits. If people are familiar with a particular way of thinking, it can be difficult to change their minds, especially without a clear strategy.

When you are implementing new tools or ways of working, you need to redefine who you are as a learning organisation.

> *"– – it's not good enough just to take the old model and digitize it. You get the most value when you really fundamentally redefine what you are and what you do."* —David Perring, Director of Research, Fosway Group[12]

It is logical to utilize as much existing learning materials as possible to save time and resources. Still, you need to evaluate if the materials and ideas from the previous training efforts support the benefits and process you plan to have in your new learning culture. Be critical and think thoroughly about what could be done in a more efficient and better way. Your growth mindset and ability to evolve are critical in creating and implementing the new learning culture.

In the next chapter, you can find some tips that help you to avoid the possible pitfalls.

▢ EXCERCISE

Do the SWOT

	HELPFUL TO ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVE	HARMFUL TO ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVE
INTERNAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE ORGANISATION	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
EXTERNAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT	**Opportunities**	**Threats**

STEP 1   Map your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

STEP 2   What's the worst thing that can happen when creating or developing your learning culture?

STEP 3   What are the most likely risks in your project?

STEP 4   How can you avoid the most likely risks?

Tips for Building and Introducing a New Learning Culture

1. Build User Personas

Different people will take part in your learning culture in a variety of ways. You should ask what the management is looking for when it comes to the learning culture, and consider what the learners are looking for. They will need different kinds of training and other types of tactics to be engaged successfully. Carefully crafted structures will help you to serve the individual the learning they need when they need it.

User personas are a method that designers and marketers use. It helps you better understand different learners and step into their shoes. Start building the personas by doing user research, for example, by interviewing employees or doing surveys. Then create user profiles, learner archetypes based on the analysis of the collected data. When we understand the learners' needs and what their pains are, we can likely better support them in their work.[13]

Example Persona

Alex 34 years old	**TASKS AND WORK ENVIRONMENT** He's very detail-oriented about his work. Alex likes to focus on his own work and stay out of the spotlight. If something is wrong, somebody else will fix things eventually. He hates meetings and bad code but isn't very comfortable expressing his feelings and needs to others. Alex is highly regarded among his engineer peers.	**PAINS** No time for learning. Lack of motivation. Mandatory learning content is uninspiring and modules are too long.	**GAINS** Platform to share best practices with others.

ROLES IN VALAMIS
· Learner (Global)
· Organization member (Development team)

ORGANIZATION / JOB TITLE
· ACME
· Product development, Lead software developer

WHY COME TO LXP?

Doing mainly mandatory studies in Valamis. Low motivation to use the system.

Alex doesn't consider himself as an active learner but in reality, he learns technical details every day on the job and is happy to share them with other engineers.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM IN VALAMIS?

For Alex, on-demand and microlearning are more important than traditional courses.

Learning mandatory courses and webinars.

Social learning tools for sharing information among the dev team.

2. Don't Concentrate Only on Technology and Features

Because technology influences some of the fastest changes in society, sometimes change in a company's learning starts by addressing technological needs - the old learning platform does not serve its purpose anymore, or the learning materials are scattered all over different systems. When getting started with finding a new learning system, a natural step is to start looking at the features that other solutions offer.

Sometimes we see Excel sheets of hundreds of rows full of feature requirements.

Once you have several vendors competing for your attention, you are likely to face information overload with hundreds of features each. All the features you need (and more) are right there before your eyes; the only thing you need to do now is to pick the right vendor.

However, technology without learning culture is useless.

What is the use of a learning solution if people try it once, find it not fitting their needs, and never return? What do you do with a fancy chatbot if your learners don't end up using it?

Your old learning models and structures will not necessarily work in your new learning environment. It is important to think about the learning and learning culture needs from a business point of view. Find the problems you are trying to solve and the structures that are not working. Once those are figured out, start rebuilding your structures and look for a partner or solution provider who can help you find the features that your new training and learning culture actually need to thrive.

> *"We want to focus on increasing adoption, engagement and awareness rather than purely on a list of features. Chatbots, Intelligent Knowledge Discovery, AI etc. are useful and important but only if people are using the LXP."* —L&D Manager, Valamis Customer[14]

3. Encourage Learners to Develop New Habits

Changing an individual's attitude is often the hardest of the three learning types (with the other two being knowledge and skills).[15] It is sometimes the people's attitudes we have to work with in order to drive change or introduce new ways of learning and sharing knowledge. If shifting people's minds about learning fails, the learning culture fails and the investments made into learning won't necessarily pay back the dividends learning cultures can produce.

Alternatively, people may need to change their habits related to old learning systems or processes. Old ways of doing things sometimes stick to us all, and it takes some genuine efforts to help people learn the new.

> *"The only thing that's harder than starting something new, is stopping something old."* —Russel Achoff[16]

Breaking old habits can also be a challenge for an organisation when building a new learning culture. In the worst-case scenario, looking backwards instead of ahead can even stop you from utilizing all the possibilities a new learning culture could bring.

To help individuals develop new habits, clear communication and reasoning are needed. Offer people proof about the new ways and the benefits of developing new habits. Create supporting structures and environment. Help people to question their habits; for example, by challenging them to prove themselves wrong[17], or to prove that you are wrong. To avoid coming this far, include everyone in the planning process - that way, they are the ones finding out that habits need to change for the new learning culture to thrive.

> **⬚ EXERCISE**
>
> ### Develop Structures and Environment
>
> **STEP 1** Think about your current structures and environment, and find out what is not working.
>
> **STEP 2** Define what you would like to achieve with the problem you picked.
>
> **STEP 3** Find out what changes in your structures and environment are needed so that individuals get better support in their learning tasks.

4. Get Learners Involved

To ensure that your learning program serves its purpose (and to get people more engaged), get everyone involved in the process. Include people in the planning process. Interview, listen and engage them in every step of your creation process.

In some cases, you might need to convince people that change is necessary. Here are a few suggestions by Valamis learning consultants on how to encourage a positive attitude towards learning and helping them gain a growth mindset:

- Separate the primary goal into smaller goals—make sure that people can track their progress.
- Sharing is caring—encouraging staff to share their experiences and reward them.
- Encourage people to appreciate others' work and learning.
- Remind people they have permission to use the time for learning.
- Positive reinforcement - reward positive behaviour; for example, reward the learner of the month.
- Have a competition/challenge to get people to be more active in learning.
- Inspire your learners (help them to learn from the best).

📝 **EXERCISE**

Promote Sense of Involvement

STEP 1 Support the positive environment for learning by asking in the company chat what would make people more interested in learning.

STEP 2 Pick one engaging effort that you think would work in your organisation and determine what resources you need to make it happen.

6. Get the C-Level Buy-in

When building your learning culture, its alignment with the business strategy and top executives is crucial. C-level buy-in helps other stakeholders take your efforts for learning seriously; and communicate the time, will and efforts needed in learning - in building an environment that is learning-friendly and everyone has permission to learn.

Help management to set learning goals relevant to their teams and area of responsibility. Define your KPI's and give the management access to relevant reports. Measurable learning results can help you gain more substantial stakeholder buy-in at the C-level and make your success visible.

5. Make Success Visible

Learning strategist Lori Niles-Hofmann swears in the name of data-driven learning design (DDLD), and so should you when creating your new learning culture. She reasons that learning data is a guide to faster and better learning design decisions. It is also a useful tool when learning designers need to convince C-level stakeholders to invest in their learning programs. Data resonates.[18] Use the data to prove the impact the learning culture has on the business.

📝 **EXERCISE**

Data of Learning

Download our Data of Learning workbook and fill in the workshop template from your point of view.

DOWNLOAD NOW >

Learning data can be used to track learning activities, find gaps in learning content, and locating outdated learning materials. It can show who is learning, how much time they are spending, and the correlation between these two. It helps you find out when the learning is happening and paint a picture of your learning culture's current status.

On top of the learning platform, data can be gathered from various sources. It can be something you gather when talking to your colleagues and learners. Data that might be useful to you can also come from social media, personal reflection, focus groups, and case studies. Even data from external sources such as field analysts can be included in your learning data set.[19]

7. Encourage the Discovery of Learning

It's time to step into those marketing shoes and help individuals benefit from the learning culture you are creating. Some marketing tools that will help you lead your learners into the new era of building a learning culture. You will have to jump out of your L&D shoes and compose an internal marketing campaign to help get employees on board.

The most important thing to get started is to understand your audience. In this campaign, you will work with how a team member feels, what they value, appreciate, and what motivates them. If you have prepared your learner profiles, that will be a valuable tool to use here.

Tips for Communication

- Communicate "WHY"—the value a person gains from learning.
- Know your audience—choose the communication channels accordingly.
- Communicate the changes and goals and why change is essential.
- Keep messages short and objectives clear.
- Make the opposition your allies—ask your critics how they would like the learning to change.
- Build systems and structures that notify learners when new learning ventures are tested or new assets are published.
- Have your CEO and management communicate the importance of learning.
- Ask help from the marketing department.

✎ EXERCISE

Define "Why?"

STEP 1 Define the why of your learning culture. Now try to find out a way to say it in a shorter, more precise way.

STEP 2 List the goals of your learning culture in a way that anyone can understand.

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8. Don't Forget About Your Learning Culture

Josh Bersin names six points for working learning culture: building trust, empowering employees, demonstrating learning's value, encouraging reflection, formalizing learning as a process and enabling knowledge sharing.[6] So, always build trust, empower and encourage. Keep adjusting the culture and testing new methods to support your learners.


✎ EXERCISE

Prepare to Evaluate

STEP 1 Ask yourself how you will evaluate the learning culture developed over the years. For example, add the learning culture evaluation to your annual calendar.

STEP 2 Make a list of what could be the metrics you use to measure the success of your learning culture as a whole.

Supporting a learning culture needs constant effort, especially when the organisation goes through changes. Even in a hypothetical situation with no significant changes happening, the employees will come and go shaping the culture.

For example, does the sudden burst of work-related travelling create a need for re-thinking the learning process? How does the learning culture naturally shape if you let it live for a while? Will people still remember to take the time for learning? How about new customers or projects, do their needs shape the learning needs or when or how learning can happen?

Measure how your efforts are paying off with surveys once or twice a year for the overall senti-ment, and ask for feedback for each new item you introduce to the culture. Don't stop having conversations with your colleagues and management once your learning culture is "done"—keep the conversation channels open, keep evolving.
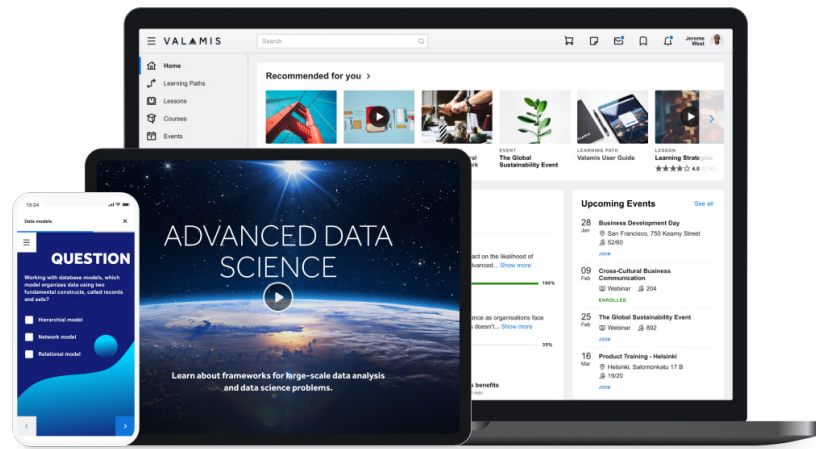
Valamis — End-to-End Learning Solution to Drive Success

Valamis is a comprehensive learning solution designed to be at the core of an organisation's learning ecosystem. It allows you to upskill and scale-up, while streamlining the learning stack.

We focus on developing a strategic partnership with our customers to create learning solutions that have the wanted impact. The one ecosystem approach helps you to integrate your systems with Valamis to increase user engagement. It reduces complexity and costs, as everything is accessible via one user interface.

> *"Valamis has essentially built the modern end-to-end learning platform every company dreams about."* —Josh Bersin[20]

Valamis offers learning analytics to drive high engagement. The analytics help you to maintain your content relevant and optimal for its purpose. Our strategic partnership approach allows you to increase business value throughout the lifecycle of the solution. Your feedback is used to develop the platform to adapt to the ever-changing needs of a modern workforce.

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