

BUILDING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

The Foundation of a Successful Organization

 **31%**

of Organizations Have a Culture of Learning

TOP PERFORMERS ARE:

5x more likely to have a learning culture.

3x more likely to use the learning culture in recruiting.

3x more likely to hold leaders accountable for demonstrating learning's importance.

832 PARTICIPANTS
talent development professionals

HOW TO BUILD A CULTURE OF LEARNING

 Make time for learning

 Personalize development plans

 Create accountability

 Use culture to attract new talent

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

The Foundation of a Successful Organization

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A NOTE FROM OUR SPONSOR



A Note From Paradigm Learning

For the past 20 years, we have seen two basic approaches to learning in organizations:

- ▶ the necessary compliance and mandatory learning in place
- ▶ a desire to improve performance, engagement, and morale; attract, develop, and retain talent; create a learning culture; and drive innovation.

It is when an organization has the second approach that success happens. A true learning culture provides an active process to learning. It develops morale and motivation. It aids in the retention of talent. It fosters the understanding and appreciation for other perspectives. At Paradigm Learning we are involved in creating the learning solutions that power an innovative, rich learning culture within organizations. We believe in it and we've seen the results firsthand.

About Paradigm Learning

Paradigm Learning empowers organizational leaders to develop business-savvy and aligned employees, leaders, and sales professional with innovative, fun, and creative learning experiences. For more than 20 years it has built, designed, and deployed gamified custom learning for organizations around the globe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A workplace in which learning is a valued way of life, knowledge is readily shared, and performance steadily improves—at both the individual and organizational levels—is the vision that drives companies to establish and expand cultures of learning. Organizations are more competitive, agile, and engaged when knowledge is constantly and freely shared.

However, despite the obvious benefits, only 31 percent of organizations have well-developed learning cultures.

New research from the Association for Talent Development (ATD) and the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) reveals that robust cultures of learning are distinct hallmarks of organizations that consistently produce the best business results—companies that lead the world’s markets in revenue growth, profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction.

Through the lens of high performance, ATD and i4cp explore the practices talent development leaders are applying to drive vibrant learning cultures at Marriott International, SAP, Merck, and other successful organizations. The research identifies actions business leaders in top companies take to support those cultures, looks at the roles played by employees, and the constructive contributions to be gained from effective talent management processes.

Robust cultures of learning are distinct hallmarks of organizations that consistently produce the best business results.

Characteristics that define learning cultures can vary, but talent development leaders described such essential traits as closely aligned business and learning strategies, organizational values that affirm learning’s importance, and an atmosphere in which learning is so ingrained that it simply becomes “a way of life.” In such organizations, agility is more evident and change is not only embraced but exploited, while employees develop growth mindsets and seek out new opportunities to learn and to share knowledge with their colleagues.

Organizational leaders play critical roles in cultures of learning, acting as learning catalysts, motivating employees, and sharing their knowledge and expertise through leaders-as-teachers programs. Some leaders serve on governance or advisory boards, providing guidance to learning and development (L&D) functions and helping shape learning approaches that directly affect the bottom line.

Talent development includes building the knowledge, skills, and abilities of others and helping them develop and achieve their potential so that the organizations they work for can succeed and grow (Bingham 2014). A key path to achieving this is through the employee L&D function.

As companies worldwide work to attract, engage, and retain the top talent needed to drive successful strategy execution, learning cultures become increasingly important tools that are capable of exerting positive effects on the people programs that underlie competitive capabilities.

Research by i4cp into shifting patterns in work and workforces underscores the fact that a competitive edge for talent can be a game changer for companies (i4cp 2015). This is especially true for such at-risk industries as hospitality, which reportedly experiences the highest incidence (29 percent) of disengaged employees (Modern Survey 2015).

As a talent leader whose company has successfully overcome that engagement challenge, Adam Malamut, global talent officer for hotel firm Marriott International, confirms the difference a culture of learning can make and speaks to the importance of cultivating one. “The more of a learning culture you have—and Marriott’s is deep and rich—the more adaptable and innovative your company will become,” he says. “In turn, you’ll be more of a magnet for top talent because people, particularly Millennials, want to grow fast, contribute, and see they’re adding value sooner in the career process. Our learning culture is our greatest competitive advantage.”

INTRODUCTION

Performance—from the individual contributor to the organizational level—is strengthened through learning. Driving better outcomes and stronger business results are objectives underlying talent development efforts in organizations worldwide, but especially in companies that distinguish themselves as consistent high performers in national and global markets.

When ATD and i4cp collaborated to explore the state of learning cultures in today's organizations, it quickly became apparent that building cultures of learning was a trait of high performers.

For *Building a Culture of Learning: The Foundation of a Successful Organization* (hereafter, the Study), ATD and i4cp used this definition:

A culture of learning, or learning culture, is one in which employees continuously seek, share, and apply new knowledge and skills to improve individual and organizational performance. The importance of the pursuit and application of learning is expressed in organizational values and permeates all aspects of organizational life.

The Study began with a survey fielded in late 2015 that garnered responses from 832 talent development leaders. Participants were about evenly split between national and multinational or global organizations; nearly two-thirds represented enterprises with workforces of more than 1,000 employees.

Survey findings were augmented by in-depth interviews with talent development leaders from a variety of organizations that are recognized for both market performance and excellence in learning and talent development. Members of i4cp's Chief Learning and Talent Officer Board, a professional working group of leaders from top companies, also contributed insights to the Study.

Key Findings

- ▶ **Having a culture of learning is a hallmark of high-performance organizations.** Top companies are almost five times more likely than lower performers to have extensive learning cultures. Further, high performers are nearly two times more apt to say their learning functions help meet organizational business goals.
- ▶ **In high-performance organizations, employees share knowledge with their colleagues at a rate four times greater than that of workers in lower-performing firms.** That communication is supported by rewarding workers for learning, providing tools and resources for creating and sharing learning content, and making knowledge sharing a performance expectation at all organizational levels.
- ▶ **Learning cultures are rooted in the hiring process.** Discussing an employer's commitments to ongoing talent development during prehire interviews is a distinguishing trait of high-performance organizations. Just 22 percent of all respondents have similar conversations with candidates. However, those prehire commitments reflected the strongest correlation to market performance, and top companies apply the strategy at six times the rate of lower performers.
- ▶ **Three learning-culture-supportive practices related to employees are performance standouts:**
 - » regularly updated personalized development plans for every employee
 - » worker accountability for the learning specified in those plans
 - » nonfinancial rewards and recognition for employee learning.

In use extensively in less than 25 percent of organizations, the following practices strongly correlate to market performance, learning effectiveness, and the presence of well-developed learning cultures.

- ▶ **Leaders in top companies are responsible for reinforcing learning's importance.** High-performance organizations are three times more likely than lower performers to hold leaders at all levels accountable for actively demonstrating the importance of learning. Only 27 percent of organizations insist on leader accountability, marking it as a differentiating next practice.
- ▶ **Employees are aligned with the goals of the business.** Workers in high-performance companies are three times more likely to understand the role their jobs play in producing business results. They take responsibility for self-directing their learning and know how learning facilitates their career growth.
- ▶ **The L&D function's participation in talent planning activities is linked to better market performance.** At more than three times the rate of lower performers, L&D functions in top companies join in planning initiatives to help identify skills gaps. Talent development professionals then use those planning outcomes to create individual development plans (IDP) and custom learning content to close skills gaps.

- ▶ **Impact measurements—assessing learning’s effects on worker behavior and on business results—are differentiators applied extensively by fewer than one in four organizations.** These practices strongly correlate to market performance, learning effectiveness, and robust learning cultures. High-performance organizations are nearly three times more likely to measure either or both employee behavior change and business outcomes.

L&D Functions Continue Their Focus on Goals

As has been the case in past ATD and i4cp studies, the Study included an assessment of learning effectiveness, the Learning Effectiveness Index (LEI). The index is constructed by averaging responses to six statements designed to provide a snapshot of organizational learning functions’ capabilities related to learning and business objectives, the delivery of learning, and utilization of new technologies. Figure 1 presents the LEI.

The Study found the highest percentages of survey respondents affirming talent development’s support for both learning goals and organizational business objectives. Nearly half of those surveyed said their learning functions did both extensively.

Learning delivery was described as both efficient and effective by 36 percent of survey respondents, while just over 25 percent rated their use of technologies highly. The Study’s findings remain largely consistent with those documented over the past several years, reflecting little change in the perspectives provided on L&D functions’ capabilities and contributions.

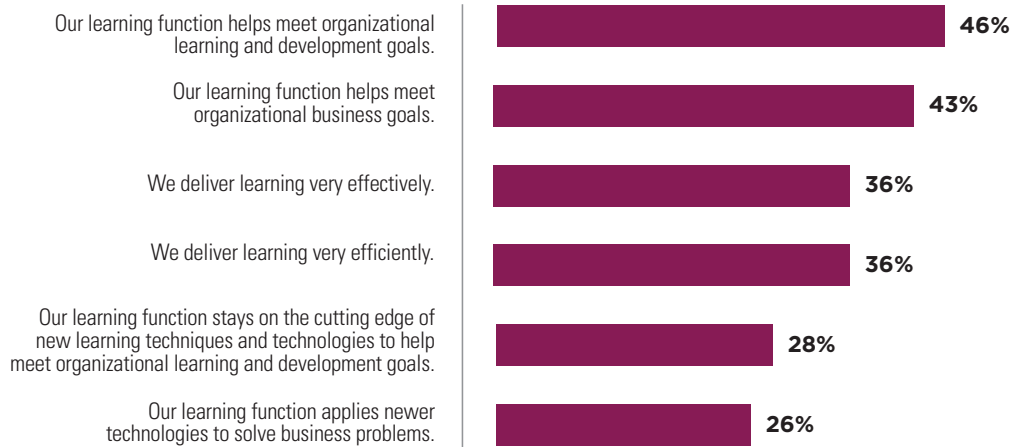
About the LEI and the MPI

This Study uses the Learning Effectiveness Index (LEI) to identify relationships between specific practices and learning success. The LEI is based on averaged responses to questions about a learning function’s ability to meet business and learning goals and the efficiency and effectiveness with which it works.

The Market Performance Index (MPI), developed by i4cp, is also used in the Study. It provides a gauge of business performance based on respondents’ ratings of their organizations’ five-year histories in revenue growth, market share, profitability, and customer satisfaction. The averaged responses provide an index enabling identification of practices that differentiate high-performance organizations.

FIGURE 1:

LEARNING CONTINUES TO BE MOST LIKELY TO SUPPORT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Market-Leading Companies Are Learning Leaders, Too

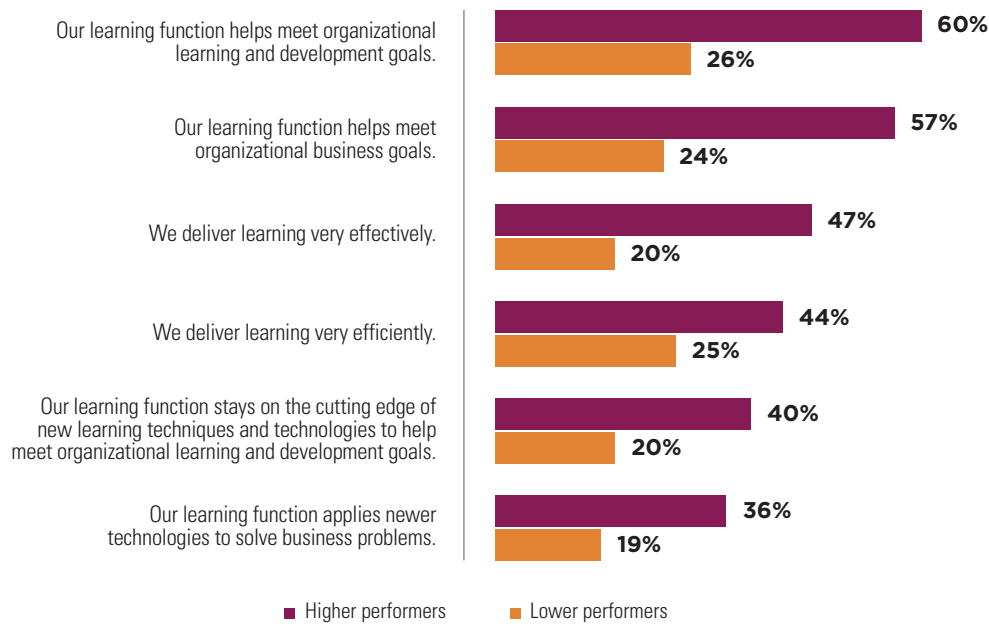
Along with the LEI, collaborative research by ATD and i4cp also includes i4cp's Market Performance Index, or MPI. The MPI is based on averaged responses to a series of statements describing an organization's bottom-line performance over time. The four core elements of that assessment are revenue growth, profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction. High-performance organizations are those reporting the strongest achievements across all four areas.

ATD and i4cp studies confirm that organizations at the top of their game in the market also rank higher across the six LEI statements rating learning effectiveness. Figure 2 contrasts high-performance and lower-performing companies, and the pattern is clear: In every element of effectiveness, the market-leading companies are nearly twice as likely to report stronger performance by their L&D functions.

In particular, well over half of respondents from high-performance companies say that L&D helps meet their organizations' business goals. This clearly underscores the learning-performance connection and demonstrates a direct link between learning and business results.

FIGURE 2:

TOP COMPANIES CONNECT LEARNING WITH BUSINESS RESULTS



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Robust Learning Cultures Characterize Many High-Performance Organizations

While the linkage between learning and business outcomes is clear, cultures of learning are not fully developed in most organizations today. In fact, only 31 percent of survey respondents said they would describe their companies as having extensive learning cultures.

While the overall number is fairly low, when market performance was factored into the mix, 42 percent of learning professionals from high-performance companies said they had extensive learning cultures. That figure greatly contrasts with the 25 percent of low-performing firms that claimed to have a learning culture.

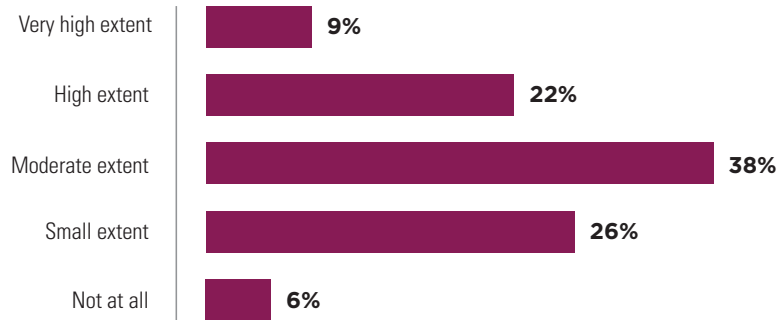
Comparisons made at the *very high extent* response level found even greater differentiation, with high-performance companies almost five times more likely than lower performers to have a learning culture in place.

Responses to the learning culture question in Figure 3 were used to create a third index based on the presence of extensive learning cultures. For the most part, organizations reporting well-developed learning cultures also were very likely to report high levels of effectiveness in overall organizational learning and high market performance. That is, they also scored highly on both the Learning Effectiveness Index and the Market Performance Index.

FIGURE 3:

FEWER THAN A THIRD OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE EXTENSIVE LEARNING CULTURES

To what extent would you describe your organization's culture as a culture of learning?

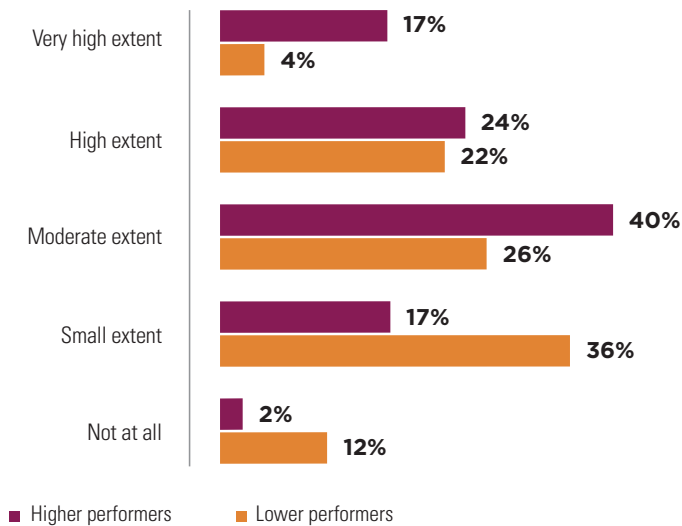


While survey responses made it clear that full-fledged learning cultures are not firmly entrenched in the majority of enterprises, they also suggest that most organizations have at least some of the elements of a learning culture in place. Overall, only 6 percent of participants described their firms as having no learning culture at all. Figure 4 splits the responses in Figure 3 by higher and lower performers.

FIGURE 4:

LEARNING CULTURES ARE MORE PREVALENT IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE COMPANIES

To what extent would you describe your organization's culture as a culture of learning?



Dissecting the Data

Some of the tables and graphs in this report include data from correlations and multiple regression analyses. Correlations measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The closer a correlation is to +1 (-1), the stronger the positive (negative) relationship between the two variables. That means that an increase in one variable is associated with an increase (decrease) in the other.

Correlations do not imply a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables involved. Rather, when a correlation between two variables is found to be statistically significant, it means that the measured relationship is not coincidental. Statistical significance is represented by p-values. For instance, a correlation with $p < .05$ implies a less than 5 percent probability that the measured correlation is a result of chance. In other words, we can be 95 percent confident that the results represent a statistical relationship and that we would very likely observe the same results were the research repeated. With a correlation with $p < .01$, which represents the majority of correlations reported in this Study, we can be 99 percent confident that these results represent a statistical relationship.

Multiple regression analysis is a way to study the influence of more than one independent variable on a single dependent variable (simple regression analysis considers one independent variable only). From a list of factors that are suspected to affect a particular outcome, multiple regression analysis can identify which of those factors has a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. Regression analysis expresses how much of the variability in the dependent variable is attributed to variability in the independent variables. For example, the productivity of a farm crop (the dependent variable) is influenced by the amount of sunlight and rain, as well as soil conditions and fertilizer (independent variables). To express the overall effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable, the coefficient of multiple correlation, R , is used.

Section 1

What Is a Culture of Learning and Why Is It Important?

ATD and i4cp termed a culture of learning as one in which employees (at all organizational levels) continuously seek, share, and apply new knowledge and skills to improve their own performance and that of the organization. Organizational values affirm the importance of learning in a culture of learning.

Most Study participants said they, too, viewed organizational values as playing a key role in learning cultures. Half of all respondents, 89 percent of those highly effective in learning, and 90 percent with extensive learning cultures said that their corporate values specifically addressed learning and development. A strong correlation to market performance also was associated with values that stressed learning's importance.

Taking a deeper dive into the elements that comprise a culture of learning, the survey asked about traits respondents used to describe a learning culture.

The Essential Characteristics of a Culture of Learning

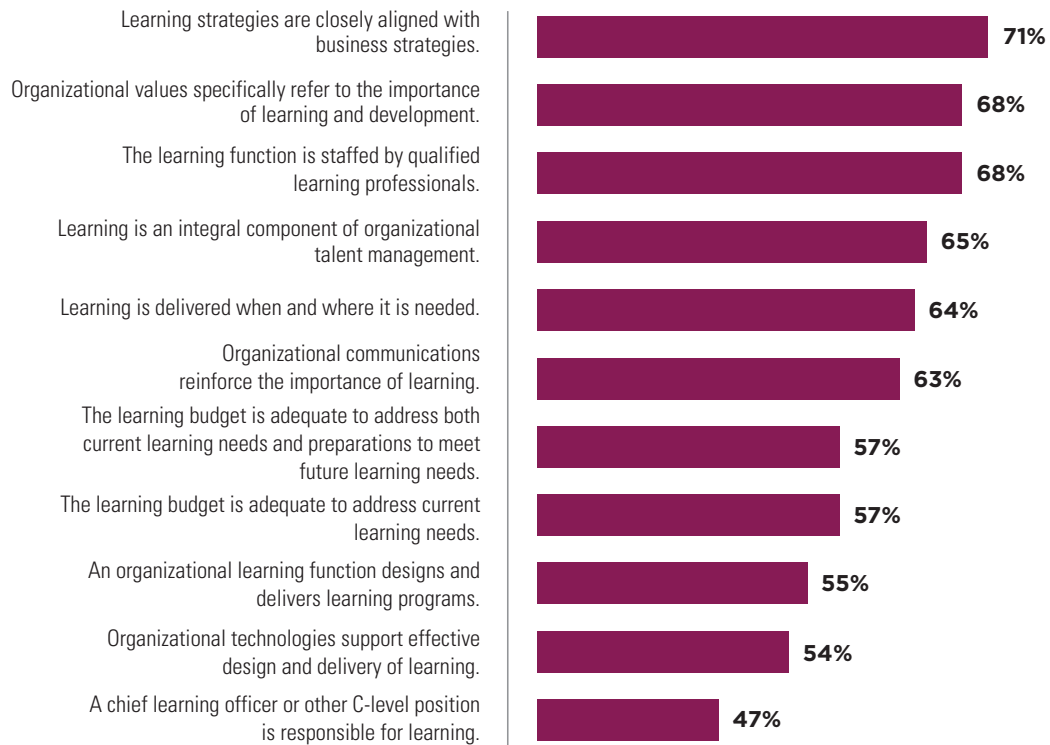
The survey question in Figure 5 presented 11 potential elements of a learning culture and asked respondents the extent to which they thought the factors were accurate descriptors. Survey participants reinforced the importance of having organizational values supporting learning and development. However, a close alignment between learning strategies and business strategies was cited by the greatest proportion (71 percent) of respondents.

Popular choices for critical learning-culture elements also included a learning function staffed by qualified professionals and the function's inclusion in talent management processes. All 11 response options were strongly correlated to market performance, learning effectiveness, and learning cultures.

FIGURE 5:

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IS SEEN AS A KEY CULTURE TRAIT

To what extent do you view the following as essential characteristics of a culture of learning in your organization?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

High-Performance Companies Cite Three Distinguishing Characteristics

Three traits really set the high performers apart, reflecting gaps of 14 percentage points or more when compared with lower performers.

Predictably, an adequate learning budget was seen as an essential characteristic. But the other two differentiating traits spoke to the actual structure of L&D functions.

The High-Performance Difference

For respondents from high-performance organizations, three essential learning-culture characteristics stood out:

- ▶ budgets sufficient to meet learning needs
- ▶ dedicated learning functions
- ▶ senior-level responsibility for organizational learning.

Top companies said that learning cultures needed a C-level executive, such as a chief learning officer or a chief talent development officer, to assume responsibility for learning. High performers also saw a dedicated learning function as a crucial aspect of learning cultures. Correlation analysis further supports the dedicated learning-function option—with that response reflecting the strongest relationship to market performance.

Learning As a Way of Life and a Mindset

Further exploration of what a culture of learning looks like found two traits cited by fewer than a third of survey respondents, but highly correlated to market performance, learning effectiveness, and the presence of robust learning cultures. Further, the traits were in far greater use by high-performance organizations, signaling the *next practices* of top companies.

Forty-six percent of market-leading companies called learning “a way of life” in their organizations—twice the rate of lower performers. Yet only a third of organizations overall described learning in the same terms.

At a rate three times that of lower-performing firms, respondents from top organizations said that their employees exhibit a growth mindset, and that they seek out learning opportunities and apply new knowledge to help drive better organizational performance.

Further reinforcing the distinctive traits of high performers, learning as a way of life and a learning mindset were key concepts that also surfaced in conversations with the learning leaders interviewed for the Study.

Global software and technology solutions firm SAP embodies a high-performance company that embraces the learning-as-a-way-of-life concept. “We define a learning culture as learning that happens anytime, anywhere, and anyhow,” says Manette Chadwick, vice president and COO, Learning Center of Excellence and Execution. “Learning is a mindset and a lifestyle, and for SAP, it is a key differentiator.”

That combination drives a move away from learning programs as predominantly prescribed, face-to-face classrooms, and formal training. Rather, it impels self-directed learning. “If I’m an individual contributor or manager at SAP, I’m responsible for my learning all the time, every day,” Chadwick explains. “I will have that mindset in any given situation. Wherever I am and whatever I’m doing there are learning opportunities. That is what a learning culture is, and it’s how we are striving to approach our learning and development as SAP employees.”

“At LinkedIn,” says Kelly Palmer, the professional network’s chief learning officer, “we’ve got an amazing culture that is embraced by our leaders and our employees. We talk about it and live it every day. And that’s the thing. You have to live it—you have to walk the talk. You can’t just say you are these things but not do them. People know when it’s real because they can feel it. And if you create an amazing culture, people will be drawn to work for your company, and they will want to stay.”

FIGURE 6:

LEARNING IS A WAY OF LIFE IN A THIRD OF COMPANIES OVERALL

To what extent do the following statements describe your organization?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Learning Cultures Drive Bottom-Line Impact

Establishing and growing a robust culture of learning is important to organizations for many reasons. But first and foremost is the performance link: Learning cultures are highly correlated with market performance—bottom-line business impact. Not only was that idea confirmed by survey findings, it was reiterated by the learning leaders interviewed for the Study.

Establishing and growing a robust culture of learning is highly correlated with bottom-line business impact.

“When you invest in learning you expect a return,” says Juan Montalvo, learning partner, global learning and development, at global healthcare leader Merck. “Leaders understand that learning is important, that there are concrete business reasons for training. They understand how it is connected to what the business is trying to achieve. Part of having a learning culture is demonstrating the value learning brings to the business—showing that performance has been positively affected because we have been able to build capability.”

Kee Meng Yeo, vice president of Enterprise Talent Development at global direct-sales firm Amway, agrees that establishing a culture of learning is vital to performance. “i4cp’s research shows that the *people* part of the organizational-performance equation explains 28 percent of a company’s performance. So anything we can do to enhance people will have an impact, especially if we define learning as employees continuously seeking, sharing, and applying new knowledge and skills.

“In times of tight budgets,” Yeo continues, “it’s even more important for organizations to invest in enabling learning that can be directed by employees, enabling them to learn what they need to know to perform the jobs they are paid to do. Contrast that with a company that prescribes learning that may or may not hit what employees need to know to be high performing. At the end of the day, investing to enable workers to continuously learn will drive organizational performance in a sustainable way.”

Companies Expect Learning Cultures to Improve Talent Outcomes

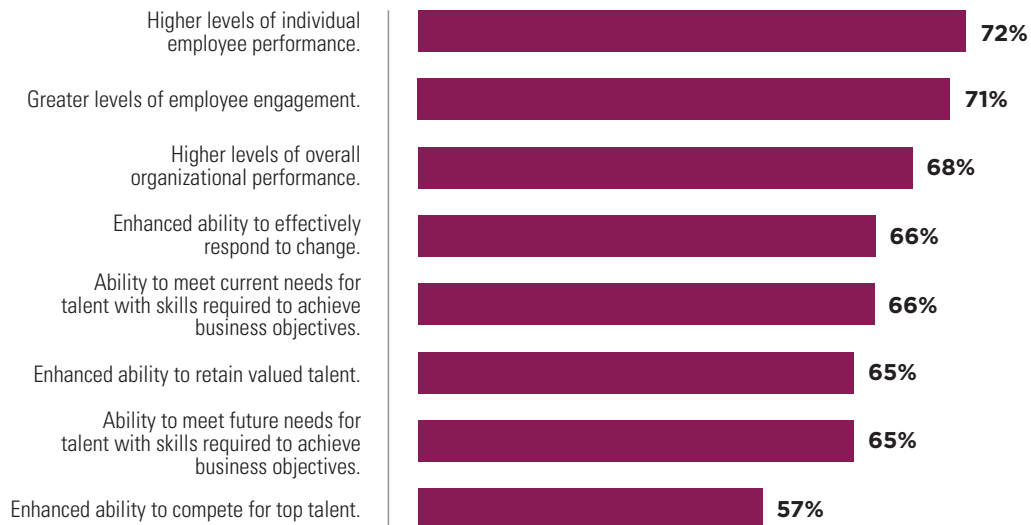
Organizations, especially high performers, look to learning cultures to help attract, retain, and engage talent. Top companies cited those talent considerations among their most-anticipated benefits from learning cultures. Correlation analysis also found a strong relationship to market performance with those talent factors.

“You can have all the latest technologies and processes, and that’s great,” says Merck’s Montalvo. “But without having the talent that can manage and execute on those processes, we would not be the organization we are right now, nor the one we want to be in the future. Our company operates in more than 140 countries to work with customers and deliver innovative health solutions, so our leaders realize how important it is not only to have talent, but to develop that talent. To make sure we can do that, there has to be a great emphasis on providing meaningful talent development. A learning culture emphasizes that. We want our talent to be a competitive advantage.”

FIGURE 7:

PERFORMANCE TOPS THE BENEFITS OF A LEARNING CULTURE

To what extent does your organization expect to gain the following benefits from establishing a culture of learning or building on an existing culture of learning?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Leaders' Actions Support Cultures of Learning

Leading by example goes a long way when it comes to the actions senior executives can take to help build and expand cultures of learning. Study findings made it apparent that leaders in high-performance organizations are setting the bar by playing active roles in learning advocacy and support.

High-Performance Companies Hold Leaders Accountable

High-performance organizations are three times more likely to hold leaders at all levels accountable for actively demonstrating the importance of learning. Nearly as extensively, those market-leading organizations reinforce learning by having their leaders serve as teachers.

This finding reinforces conclusions presented in the 2015 ATD and i4cp study *Leaders as Teachers: Engaging Employees in High-Performance Learning*. That research found a strong correlation to market performance associated with leaders serving as teachers. Further, support for a culture of learning was the top benefit Study participants said their organizations gained when leaders taught.

3x

High-performance organizations are three times more likely to hold leaders at all levels accountable for actively demonstrating the importance of learning.

Management and technology consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton is among many top companies in which leaders serve as teachers. "I attended a financial excellence program last week," says Renee Romulus, CLO and vice president of learning and development. "It is highly rated and it is 100 percent leader-led. And it's not static. The content is user-based, demand-based. As the program starts, people are polled as to what's hot right now, what's happening, and how to bring that to life in the program. So it's a different course with each audience, and it's packed. Probably 40 senior leaders were in attendance for some absolutely dynamite discussions that they could take back and apply to some of the real business issues we're facing as a firm."

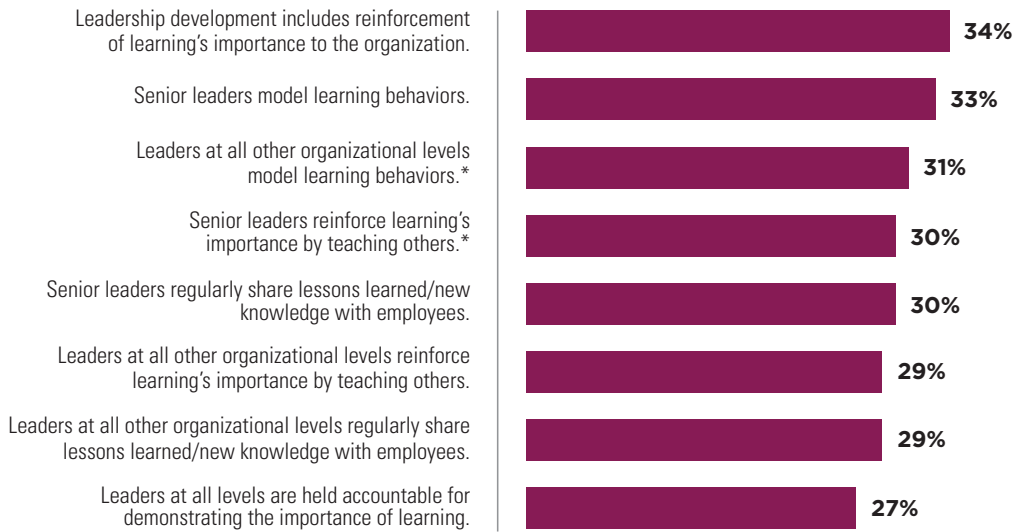
Leaders in most organizations don't engage extensively in the activities, as evidenced by the low response percentages shown in Figure 8. But high-performance organizations reported far greater leader participation. In fact, for every action, those top leaders were more than twice as likely to be involved.

All of the activities in Figure 8 showed very high correlations to market performance. They also reflected strong relationships to overall learning effectiveness and to the presence of extensive learning cultures. Those findings underscore just how critical leaders' actions are in building and nurturing cultures of learning.

FIGURE 8:

A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS (AND HALF OF TOP COMPANIES) REFERENCE LEARNING DURING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

To what extent does your organization expect to gain the following benefits from establishing a culture of learning or building on an existing culture of learning?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

**Learning behaviors include participating in learning activities, sharing new knowledge with employees, demonstrating skills, and communicating how new knowledge translates into organizational changes.*

Some Leaders Are Catalysts for Culture Change

Leaders with especially strong convictions about learning and the role it plays in driving both individual and organizational performance may emerge as pivotal figures in establishing and encouraging cultures of learning.

At SAP, Chadwick credits CEO Bill McDermott with being the driving force behind the “best learning culture in the world” goal that the company’s global learning organization has taken on. She also points to the leadership of CLO Jenny Dearborn as providing critical support and direction for shaping a metrics-driven, world-class learning culture.

Marryam Chaudhry, human resources–organizational development program manager at the Prince William County Service Authority (PWCSA), says that senior leadership is behind the vibrant learning culture at the award-winning Virginia water and wastewater utility.

“Our general manager (GM) Dean Dickey came onboard more than 10 years ago, and his task was to turn the organization into a high-performing one,” she says. “We are a political subdivision under the Commonwealth of Virginia, so we are a public sector utility, but we operate very rapidly and are as agile as a private company. Our GM believes that training and development is the cornerstone of a high-performing organization. When he arrived, he began to create a learning culture by mandating 40 hours of training per employee per year. Even after the economic downturn we maintained our focus on training and development at a continuous pace.”

Chaudhry says that Dickey’s emphasis on learning hasn’t let up even though the learning culture is now well established: “Now everyone knows that training is something very important, and the GM keeps tabs on it. For example, if there is a leadership training event scheduled, he sends out an email telling managers to send their people. Or sometimes he nominates specific employees to attend. He also reads to keep track of the latest learning trends and even provides senior managers with books to read on learning and development. He does his best to hone their expertise and to keep learning top of mind.”

Leaders Govern, Advise, and Collaborate

Conversations with learning leaders at a number of organizations provided additional examples of the ways in which senior executives and leaders at other levels take hands-on approaches to lend their support to learning cultures. The following examples from Booz Allen Hamilton and Marriott International illustrate two different, but successful approaches.

Learning Governance Involves Leaders at Booz Allen Hamilton

Fortune 500 company Booz Allen Hamilton promotes a culture of development for its approximately 23,000 employees and is focused on actions to more fully optimize strategic learning. “One of the efforts we feel will be a differentiator for us in that journey is creating a governance process where we actually have more leadership engagement in defining learning priorities,” explains Renee Romulus, CLO and VP of learning and development.

Romulus says that the strategy for learning and the governance body are in early stages, but she expects rollout in spring 2016. Although learning at Booz Allen Hamilton has a good level of strategic alignment to the business already, she sees the participation of leaders in governance as a means of taking that alignment to a higher level: “We’re looking at our more senior leaders to inform decisions in L&D investments. We have a multitiered structure that we’re recommending.” Romulus anticipates two or three tiers based on the types of learning involved: “For leadership development, for example, we have identified leaders we feel are the appropriate ones, and for our functional learning that is occurring more at the market level, we are in the process of identifying participating leaders.”

To facilitate decision making, Romulus says groups would be limited to about eight members, and she views participation as an opportunity for leaders to heighten their own visibility and development, perhaps encouraging their becoming sponsors for specific learning programming.

According to Romulus, the strategy has its critics in the L&D field. “There are learning professionals who don’t like the governance approach because it requires giving up some control, but I think it’s the right control to give up to ensure optimal alignment and strategic investments in learning and development.”

Marriott International Leaders Sponsor Collaborative Talent Network Teams

“A tactical program we’re using right now that is gaining speed is called Talent Network Teams,” explains Adam Malamut, global talent officer for hotel company Marriott International. The teams combine learning and collaboration to create innovative solutions that can be applied to meet business challenges.

According to Malamut, Marriott business leaders are accountable for sponsoring a virtual (or live, depending on participants’ locations) team and begin by posting a challenge related to their area of specialty: “The issue is posed online through a collaborative social technology and is marketed throughout the organization as a challenge anyone can participate in.”

Marriott uses SAP’s social media platform Jam to enable the collaborative learning of Talent Network Teams. Challenges are posted on a regular basis, and teams form for limited durations. “Because we have to limit participation, each session (challenge) has a participant quota of approximately 50 associates,” says Malamut. “Once the class fills, participants enroll in Jam, receive communications from the leader, and become part of an online community to work on the challenge.”

Malamut explains that team members engage in what he terms a *solutioning exercise*. Participants learn about the process involved in thinking through a challenge—they learn about the specific topic involved and how to reach a solution using the information and ideas posted by the team. Activities and online interactions follow. At the conclusion of the session, results are reported to the appropriate leadership.

Marriott has had the Talent Network Teams effort in place for about a year, and Malamut says it's producing tangible results. In a recent challenge the question "Can we reinvent the Marriott job-seeking experience?" was posed to find ways to streamline and improve the company's job-application process. A manager from Marriott's talent acquisition team sponsored the challenge and led the group.

"There wasn't a single HR person on that team aside from the sponsor," says Malamut. "We had people from IT, food and beverage, and project management who wanted to contribute to the conversation." While leaders have flexibility in how they structure projects, Malamut says the talent acquisition challenge had team members actually go through the different phases of the job application process, taking notes and then comparing their experiences and observations using Jam. Because team participants happened to be in the same physical location, they met in person to put together their suggestions for delivery to the senior HR team. Malamut calls their recommendations to improve the process "interesting and powerful."

Learning takes place in multiple ways for Talent Network Team members and leaders alike. For the leaders, Malamut says, "We give them some training and coaching on how to hold one of these sessions, how you ideate different segments of learning throughout, how to prepare a potential report-out, that sort of thing. But it's not very rigorously scripted because we want to enable an agile approach."

For their part, team members learn about the specific topic, the line of business to which it pertains, problem-solving techniques, and online collaborative capabilities. "You learn from the people you're working with on that challenge, about the areas they come from, and what they do," adds Malamut. "It opens your eyes to other areas of the business. At the same time, you're building a peer network where you can engage, get advice, and explore potential new career paths. In sum, you have a business challenge marketed through social channels that is open to participation by anyone at any level of the company. That delivers a really dynamic approach to learning."

Section 3

Employee and Organizational Practices Support Learning Cultures, Too

The Study affirmed that leaders aren't the only organizational stakeholders with the ability to affect learning cultures. Employees have their own contributions to make and roles to play. Talent management practices and other organizational processes also affect cultures of learning.

Employee Knowledge Sharing Is a High-Performance Practice

In high-performance organizations, employees share knowledge with their colleagues at a rate four times that of workers in lower-performing firms. Market-leading companies support that communication by rewarding workers for learning, providing tools and resources for creating and sharing learning content, and making knowledge-sharing a performance expectation for individuals at all organizational levels.

In a majority of companies, intranets provide a means of sharing knowledge. Live meeting platforms (such as Webex or Adobe Connect), organizational social media, and mobile devices offer collaborative opportunities as well. While most companies use similar tools to encourage employees to share user-generated content, high-performance organizations are about twice as likely to supplement those tools by making a point of instructing workers on how to use social media for learning.

3x

Workers in those top companies are three times more likely to understand the role their jobs play in producing business results.

4x

In high-performance organizations, employees share knowledge with their colleagues at a rate four times that of workers in lower-performing firms.

User-Generated Content Lags in Many Companies

Although only 13 percent of survey respondents said their organizations did not provide tools or resources to encourage knowledge sharing, user-generated content remains a largely untapped opportunity for many organizations.

Concerns about employees sharing inaccurate or inappropriate information may account for some reluctance to emphasize knowledge sharing, but a lack of easy-to-use tools is likely a more significant hindrance. Further, capitalizing on user-generated content could require a mindset shift for the L&D function.

Amway's Yeo advises: "Relinquish the need to control employees' learning and do not overly structure what an employee needs to learn. I'm not advocating the abolition of formal or structured learning, but I think the role of the L&D function more and more needs to be to enable employees to find knowledge, and for employees themselves to provide the knowledge that they need to perform their jobs and to grow to their aspired level."

Harnessing the Power of User-Generated Learning Content at Marriott

Study findings confirmed that employees are much more likely to share knowledge with their peers in high-performance organizations. At Marriott International, several of the company's brands are leveraging the power of user-generated learning content and knowledge sharing to help drive excellence in customer service.

"A few years ago we launched an app to teach service training," Global Talent Officer Adam Malamut explains. "It's based on the idea of crowdsourcing effective ways of responding to situational cues to deliver brilliant service. Our staff can take photos of something that is actually happening, or they can set up a fictitious scenario to photograph. They take a photo of the circumstance, upload it, and describe the situational cue that associates should pay attention to in that situation. Then the employee describes a potentially brilliant way to respond to that cue."

Malamut gives an example of a photo featuring a young couple in a hotel lobby with a crying child who is clearly tired from traveling: "An associate set up a picture of that situation and said, 'Here at our location we give a toy or coloring books to travel-weary children when they arrive.'"

The app interface has a look that Malamut describes as being reminiscent of Pinterest. Users can rate the featured service response and comment on it. The content is made available worldwide to associates who work for that particular hotel brand. According to Malamut, the curated content becomes a sort of wiki for service responses, building a database where associates can see what their colleagues across the hotel brand are doing to address a particular issue.

“Everything is coded, too,” Malamut explains. “It could be where in the hotel the subject is occurring. You could sort based on arrivals, for instance. You can also search by a particular part of the world. Arrivals in India, let’s say. Maybe you work in a hotel outside Chicago and local business parks draw a lot of Indian business travelers there. We tell our managers to use the app to look at curated content of what employees are learning in our hotels in India. That cultural view that shares learning from another part of the world can really help the Chicago hotel elevate the arrival experience for our diverse travelers.”

While most of the user-generated content curated thus far relates to Marriott’s service associates, Malamut would like to extend the app’s capabilities to other areas as well. “How you might set up events or generate IT or engineering solutions to problems. I think there’s more we could do to feature the local solutions associates are generating. As long as we curate it in ways that make it accessible, searchable, and useful to people, that can be of great value.”

The app—called Frame It and accessed using employees’ mobile devices—is in use in the Marriott Hotels brand. The JW Marriott brand uses a similar technology, but adds video-based training capabilities. “We launched an equivalent for our Ritz-Carlton brand this year,” says Malamut. “So we’re dabbling in the space a lot, especially because pulling people off the floor to attend a training event is costly by the time you pay workers to take the training while also paying other workers to fill in. So the more we can do nanobyte learning and provide training refreshers in the moment on the job, the more nimble we can be and better fuel the learning spirit in our organization.”

Line of Sight Is Critical for Employees

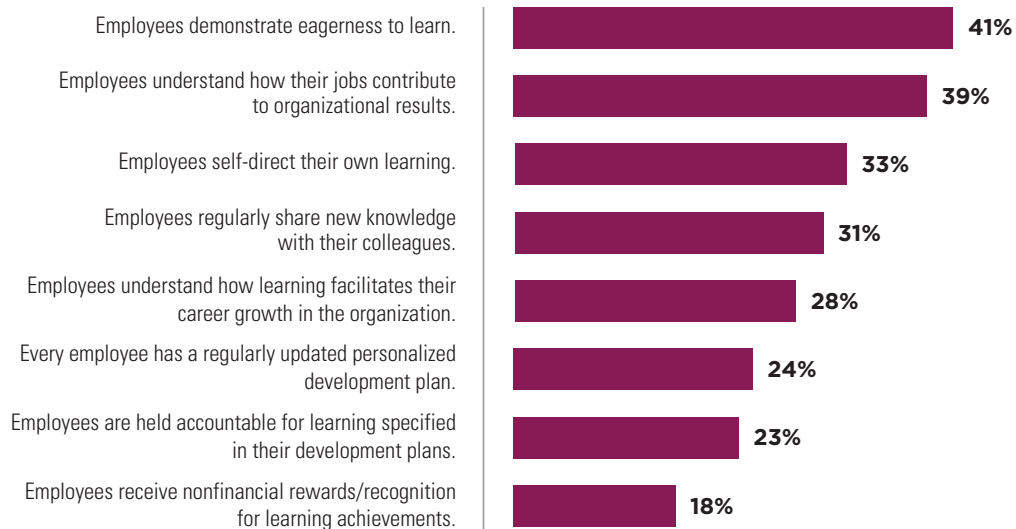
The Study found that workers in top companies are three times more likely to understand the role their jobs play in producing business results. They take responsibility for self-directing their learning, and they know how learning facilitates their career growth.

Employees in most organizations aren’t as attuned to learning’s benefits. Although the greatest proportion of respondents (41 percent) said their employees are eager to learn, lower response rates for the other options listed make it clear that there is plenty of room to encourage workers to be more proactive about learning.

FIGURE 9:

MOST RESPONDENTS SAID EAGERNESS TO LEARN TOPPED EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEARNING CULTURES

To what extent are the following actions related to your organization's employees used to support a culture of learning?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

3 Next Practices Offer Culture-Building Advantages

The Study also uncovered three learning-culture supportive practices related to employees who proved to be performance standouts:

- ▶ creating and regularly updating personalized development plans for every employee
- ▶ mandating worker accountability for the learning specified in those plans
- ▶ providing nonfinancial rewards/recognition for learning.

Used extensively by less than 25 percent of organizations, these next practices strongly correlate to market performance, learning effectiveness, and the presence of extensive learning cultures. Because they are so rarely used, companies that apply them may realize rewards in strengthening or expanding their learning cultures.

Organizations Use Talent Processes to Support Learning Cultures

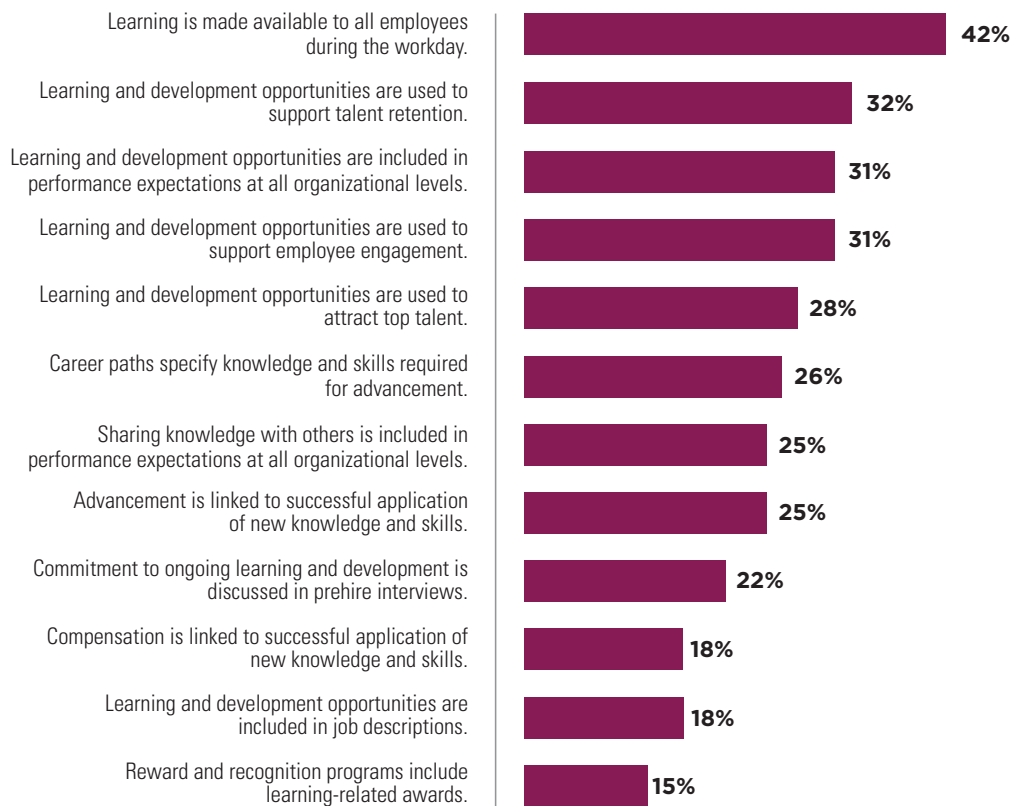
The practices and processes organizations use, especially those related to talent management, can have significant effects on learning cultures. However, the Study found that fewer than half of survey respondents exploit the opportunities their processes could offer.

The greatest single proportion (42 percent) of learning and business leaders surveyed said that making learning available to all employees during the workday was their top strategy to support learning cultures. Certainly, making time for learning is critical, and doing so is correlated highly with market performance and learning effectiveness. But fitting learning into busy workdays can be a trying task even for top organizations.

FIGURE 10:

TALENT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AFFECT LEARNING CULTURES

To what extent does your organization leverage the following talent management processes/elements to support a culture of learning?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

SAP's Chadwick says that time spent on learning is a challenge for employees in her company. "People know that a lot of learning content is available, but don't feel they can take time away from their jobs for learning. And we don't have a formal edict that says every employee must have a specific number of hours allocated for learning. So one of the issues we must address in our transition to the best learning culture in the world is enabling employees to take time during the workday to learn, without having that learning compete with the performance goals for which they are being held accountable. People make time for the things they deem important. We need to position learning as critical to employees' growth and success, and then help them find solutions within the context of their workday."

ATD and i4cp found that all the talent management processes referenced in the survey reflected strong market performance and learning effectiveness correlations (Figure 10). Without exception, high-performance companies reported their use of each process in support of learning cultures to a much greater extent than lower performers. However, one approach stood out above the rest.

Employees Own Their Own Feedback and Development at Twitter

At public communication platform Twitter, "our main focus is to drive employee ownership of their own development and of their path here," says Learning Design and Technology Consultant Julian Napolitan. Working with Melissa Daimler, head of learning + organizational development, Napolitan is part of a learning and development team that is retooling how Twitter approaches learning accessibility, performance feedback, and ratings.

"We're getting rid of our old rating system," he explains. "And we're doing a lot around feedback and development, tying that to learning opportunities we offer or that are available to people in their positions here at Twitter. So we're bridging the gap between where people currently are and where they want to be in their skill sets and their personal and professional development."

Empowering Twitter employees to share their own experiences and best practices with one another is a key focus of the learning function's activities. "We're shifting from more traditional learning to learning that's sourced from our own employees and our own experts," Napolitan says. "We're empowering everybody to be a teacher or mentor so they can provide knowledge in their areas of expertise without barriers."

Central to that employee empowerment, Napolitan explains, "is a product called Pathgather that we've just branded as #LearningPortal. It catalogs resources from our LMS, but employees can couple classes offered in the LMS into learning paths with anything else that lives in the catalog. People can add their own items to the catalog, too." That flexibility means that Twitter employees are able to create their own learning paths, sourcing content from both internal and external sources. Says Napolitan, "We're giving people the opportunity to curate different resources from different providers into an informal curriculum based on how they've become better at a particular skill or in their role."

The organization supports a learning culture with extensive content and enabling tools, but does not offer certifications. “We feel the positive reinforcement is the experience they get from learning and being able to take new skills back to their position,” explains Napolitan. “Also, to be more empowered to develop themselves, network with other people, and have communities of learning and growth.” He adds, though, that the #LearningPortal does include some gamification, giving employees points when they complete learning paths or specific content.

In conjunction with the #LearningPortal, Twitter’s learning team is working on a new means of feedback and development, emphasizing workers’ growth in a set of organizational skills that include such capabilities as experimenting with new ideas, collaborating effectively, and developing others.

“If I want to be evaluated on my organizational skills,” says Napolitan, “I go into a place called the Portfolio and do a 360 check-in, which includes myself, my manager, and anybody on my team or outside my team that I want feedback from. Everybody submits their evaluations and the results are aggregated in my Portfolio. Then I use that data to have a development conversation with my manager around what my skill development might be. There are resources in the #LearningPortal that I can access to learn those new skills and apply them in my job.”

Employees also can solicit feedback from colleagues using a tool called Comments. Developed in house, the tool enables workers to access their Portfolio and request comments from those with whom they’ve worked on projects, attended meetings, or collaborated. “I can ask them for feedback about a particular event in real time,” Napolitan explains. “So there’s no biannual feedback process. It’s all ongoing, continuous feedback anytime you want it with data aggregated in your Portfolio.”

The #LearningPortal and Portfolio tools are new, but communication from the L&D team will focus on expanding adoption. “I think in any organization there’s a need for your employees to feel that their development and growth are priorities—especially in our industry and especially where we are,” Napolitan notes. “If people are coming to Twitter and they don’t feel they can grow or don’t know the resources available to them for their development, they will get bored and potentially go elsewhere.”

For Top Companies, Cultures of Learning Are Rooted in the Hiring Process

The Study confirmed that high-performance organizations recognize the power inherent in making learning a “way of life.” Nowhere is that more apparent than in the finding that market-leading companies include learning discussions in their hiring interviews at six times the rate of lower-performing organizations. Only about 20 percent of companies represented in the survey discuss their commitments to learning during prehire interviews. In contrast, 36 percent of high-performing organizations have such discussions.

36%

of high-performance organizations talk about the commitments they make to continuous learning during interviews with job candidates.

Marriott’s hiring process includes multiple references to learning and development, says Malamut. “We tell candidates that there are many learning assets available to them to build their own careers, and we describe what those are. Beyond that, we provide more information about our People First Culture on the careers page of our website and through our social channels. Our Facebook career page, for instance, talks about the development culture here at Marriott: What the culture looks like, why we think it’s important, the learning programs employees go through as hourly associates and managers, and the many assets beyond those required that are available to employees who want to develop themselves.”

At PWCSA, Chaudhry says that the L&D function uses assessment tools during screening to identify areas on which development would focus, and these are communicated to candidates when an employment offer is extended. “Applicants go through a plethora of tests before they are brought in for an interview. After the interview, sometimes the offer letters include contingencies. They might say that the candidate has the experience required for a job, but lacks a specific skill set in a particular area, so we would require learning and development in those skills within a defined period of time. We tell applicants that we are very highly focused on L&D, and that there will be a lot of opportunities for them, but that growth depends on the individual. For example, we offer a generous tuition reimbursement program, but it is up to the employee to seek and benefit from that opportunity.”

Section 4

L&D: Building and Measuring Learning Cultures

The L&D function is at the center of the organizational forces and elements that contribute to establishing, nurturing, and expanding cultures of learning. Half of survey participants (the greatest single proportion) said their L&D organizations best supported learning cultures by designing learning programs that address specific business needs. Two-thirds of market-leading companies said the same. But the most-common practices and those correlated to high-performance do not match.

Gap Analysis Is Strongly Linked to Market Performance

Figure 11 shows that of all respondents, only half design learning to address specific business needs. Even fewer take the other named actions to support a culture of learning. When ATD and i4cp examined correlations to market performance, learning effectiveness, and the presence of learning cultures, all the actions listed in the survey reflected strong relationships across all three indices. However, the strongest correlation to market performance resulted when the L&D function played a part in planning activities designed to identify employee skills gaps, both current and potential. This means that L&D functions in top companies play a role in regular workforce planning and talent planning initiatives, and do so at a rate more than three times that occurring in lower-performing organizations.

“We are a member of the team developing strategy,” says Merck’s Montalvo. “Part of that participation is helping identify the critical capabilities we need to develop to ensure we can enable, accelerate, and sustain the organization’s strategies. Everything must connect to what we’re trying to pursue as a company. Having visibility to the strategy and being able to influence and facilitate processes to identify critical capabilities really is driving the business. That’s when L&D is adding value to the organization.”

3x

Top organizations are three times more likely to participate in workforce or talent planning initiatives to identify employees’ current and potential future skills gaps.

Content Curation, Behavior Change, and IDPs Are on L&D's Radar

In addition to their participation in talent planning, learning professionals in high-performance companies were nearly three times more likely to support learning cultures through activities in three other areas:

- ▶ curating both internal and external learning content
- ▶ assessing employee behavioral changes resulting from learning programs
- ▶ providing learning content customized to individual development plans (IDPs) created for employees.

FIGURE 11:

L&D MOST OFTEN SUPPORTS LEARNING CULTURES THROUGH LEARNING DESIGN

To what extent does your organization's learning function take the following actions to support a culture of learning?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Learning Leaders Advocate Alignment

Ensuring tight alignment between organizational business strategies and learning strategies is a critical component in learning cultures. Highly correlated to market performance, alignment reflected the strongest correlations to both learning effectiveness and robust learning cultures. Learning leaders noted that alignment served to help them hone learning assets to better focus efforts on training programs that were most likely to drive desired business results.

Booz Allen Hamilton's Romulus says, "We're looking at how we tailor and curate some of our learning programs so we are reducing the learning options. That sounds somewhat counterintuitive. Too often for learning organizations, it's about creating as many options as possible. We're looking at how to take a step back and tailor those offerings so that ultimately we'll have fewer learning options, but those we do have will be more aligned to driving the strategic direction set for the company and really helping to target learning opportunities to grow the business."

"We work very closely with the business," says SAP's Chadwick, adding that the learning organization's enterprise-level alignment includes interactions with the company's global managing board, a group composed of SAP's business leaders. The executive vice presidents report directly to CEO Bill McDermott. "We asked the board about the biggest business challenges they're facing over the next one to five years," she says. "Then we asked about their views on learning and talent development, and what the talent development strategy must be in order to achieve their business goals. Essentially we were engaging in good performance consulting with the board to identify the key business needs learning must address."

Antoinette Handler, corporate vice president of human resources for Avanade, a business technology solutions and managed services company, also affirms the importance of alignment. "We conducted a number of needs analysis meetings and now are rationalizing and prioritizing our curriculum and training needs based on our business strategy. That business strategy has determined the organizational capabilities required. Now we are working with a number of key C-suite leaders to finalize our aligned learning strategy and plan."

Leaders Cite the Need for Easy Accessibility to Learning

Making learning easily accessible to employees in order to shift training from a push to a pull endeavor also emerged as a learning-culture cornerstone, based on conversations with learning leaders.

Marriott's Malamut says that questions learning functions must address to support a learning culture are: "How do we put forward an ecosystem that allows for continuous learning? And how do we provide the assets that enable people to do this in ways that make learning a pull from employees, not a push from Corporate?"

The answer for L&D, he says, involves “shifting the focus to be less around training and more about curation of knowledge on an ongoing basis. Also, making it more easily accessible for people so they will use the assets you’ve created to manage learning on their own. You have to work hard to make learning a pull. I think the learning organization has responsibility to really make the learning compelling, habitual, easily accessed, and not a drag on employees’ time. Then people will pull more and more for it.”

Napolitan, at Twitter, agrees that putting in place the elements to make learning easily accessible and user-driven are key contributions the L&D function makes to support a culture of learning. “I think people are hungry to govern their development,” he says, “and that what we’re putting in place helps provide an avenue or solution to meet that need. Our focus is on tools that support our philosophy and what we want people to be able to do with their time here at Twitter, and using that to plug in systems to create and drive this learning ecosystem. We’re proud of those efforts, and we think the work L&D is doing is going to have a huge impact on the organization.”

Impact Measurements Are Performance Drivers

Research by ATD and i4cp has repeatedly pointed out that learning professionals struggle when it comes to systematically measuring learning and the impact learning assets and programs have on an organization’s bottom-line business results. The current Study is no exception.

The Study found that the real differentiators for high-performance companies are impact measurements. Assessing learning’s effect on worker behavior and on business results is done extensively by fewer than one in four organizations overall.

But those next practices highly correlate to market performance, learning effectiveness, and the presence of learning cultures. High-performance organizations measure employee behavior change at a rate more than three times that of lower performers, and those top firms are six times more likely to gauge learning’s effect on business outcomes.

3x

High-performance organizations measure employee behavior change at a rate more than three times that of lower performers.

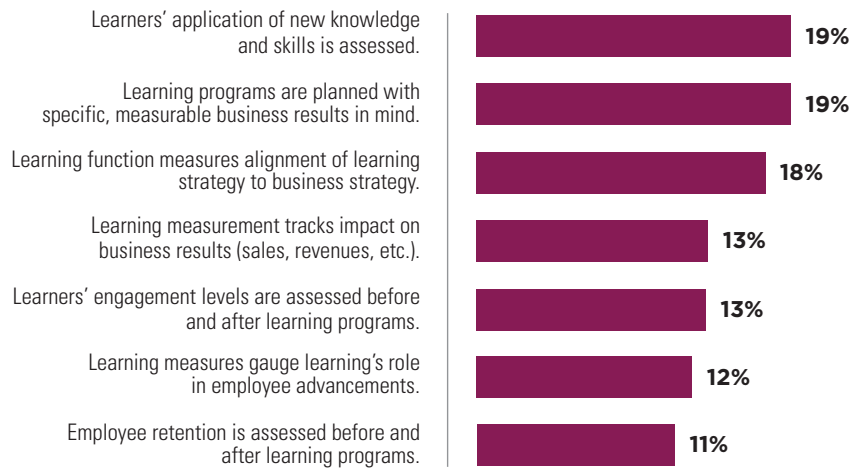
6x

Top companies are six times more likely to gauge the effects of learning on business results.

FIGURE 12:

NOT ENOUGH ORGANIZATIONS TAKE SPECIFIC MEASUREMENT ACTIONS

To what extent do the following apply to measurement of learning in your organization?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

Learning Leaders View Measurement as Critical to Learning Cultures

The learning leaders interviewed for the Study were unanimous in their perception of the important role measurement plays in supporting a culture of learning and the L&D function.

Montalvo at Merck says, "We must be able to measure to demonstrate the value we bring to the business, to show that performance has been positively affected because we have been able to build capability. It ensures we are acting on the right things and helps us be very focused on the capabilities we need. There is also an expectation that the learning is important. When you invest in learning you expect a return. Leaders understand that there are concrete business reasons for training. They understand how it is connected to what the business is trying to achieve."

Early in the development of Merck learning initiatives, the company defines the types of measurement that will be associated with particular programs, Montalvo explains. "We have specific measurements that we use for every learning intervention or event. One of the deeper measures we use is the promoter score—whether participants recommend the training to others. We are aligning many of our processes to provide the metrics that enable our leaders to communicate the value of learning interventions."

At Twitter, the #LearningPortal platform provides what Napolitan describes as “good analytics we can use to measure activity. That gives us a good idea of the benefit of it. There is a back-end analytics interface where we can pull completion data for managers if they want to see the most popular resources and what people are spending time on. Our LMS also enables us to compile more rigid analytics from that system.”

Napolitan says Twitter’s learning team supplements technologically enabled measurements with live interviews. “We do regular interviews with content owners and talk about how it’s benefited them in qualitative ways. We are also doing a lot of in-person meetings with people to drive adoption of the #LearningPortal, consult on best practices, and get their input on value.” He adds that employee surveys provide further perspectives on the effectiveness of learning at the company, and that looking at data from multiple inputs is crucial to understanding the effectiveness of the ecosystem.

Like Twitter, SAP’s learning organization also gleans insight into the state of learning and development from annual people surveys that include several L&D-related questions. Chadwick notes that under the leadership of analytics and data expert Dearborn, the L&D function’s main focus on measuring its success in driving the learning culture is “making sure that all learning programs are mapped to specific key performance indicators and measured for business impact.”

Section 5

Overcoming Challenges to Build Learning Cultures

According to survey participants, learning functions encounter their share of issues that threaten to impede progress in establishing or expanding cultures of learning. Again and again, research by ATD and i4cp finds resources to be stumbling blocks for L&D, regardless of the topic under investigation; 40 percent of respondents find that the same issues apply to learning cultures. Both financial and nonfinancial resources were cited as leading barriers to building an effective learning culture.

Threats to Business Performance

Analysis of the survey findings revealed several conditions that were most likely to pose a threat to organizational performance. These three barriers to building learning cultures reflected the strongest negative correlations to market performance—the more these conditions are present, the less likely an organization is to report high performance:

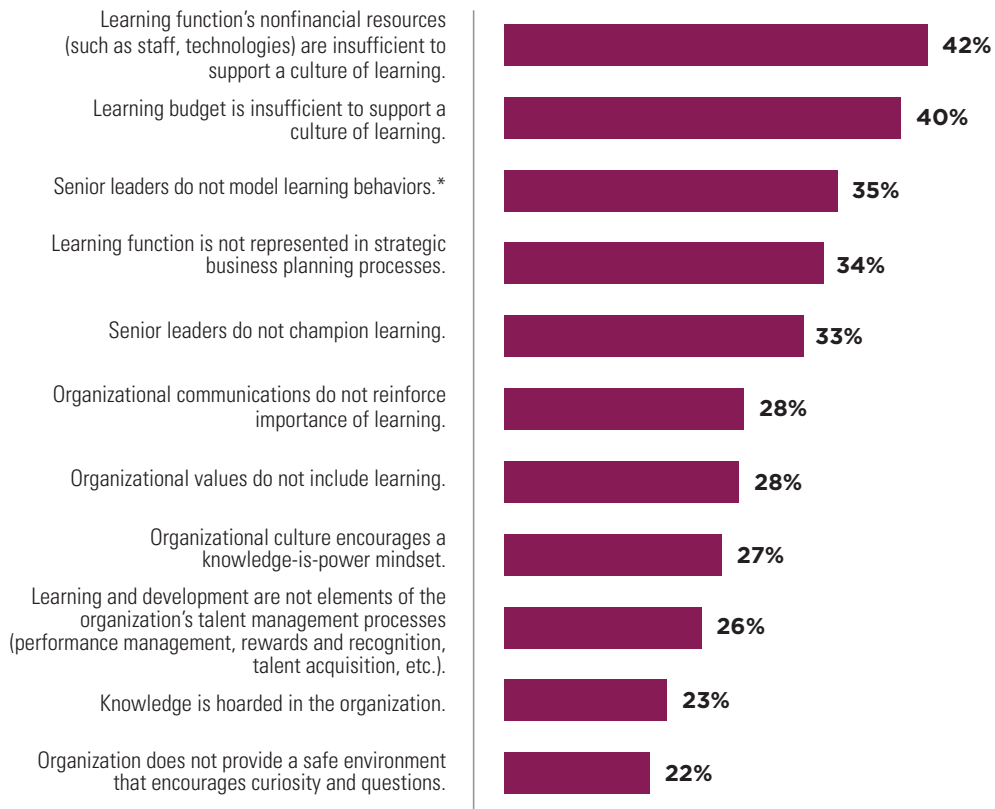
- ▶ organizational communications that fail to reinforce the learning function's importance
- ▶ corporate values that omit learning
- ▶ exclusion of the learning function from strategic business planning processes.

L&D's absence in business planning also reflected the highest negative correlation to learning effectiveness. That obstacle was cited nearly twice as often by lower-performing organizations when compared with high-performance companies. Those lower performers were also more than two times more likely to experience problems establishing learning cultures because their senior leaders did not champion learning.

FIGURE 13:

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LEARNING CULTURES POSE OBSTACLES FOR L&D

To what extent are the following barriers to building an effective culture of learning in your organization?



Percent of respondents indicating high or very high extent.

**Learning behaviors include participating in learning activities, sharing new knowledge with employees, demonstrating skills, and communicating how new knowledge translates into organizational changes.*

Despite Stumbling Blocks, L&D Functions Are Building Learning Cultures

When asked about their L&D organizations' most successful actions to establish or expand cultures of learning, survey participants provided glimpses into a variety of approaches. The following are a few examples:

- ▶ "We are about to launch a new learning management model that focuses on building business schools within the organization under strong supervision and participation of business leaders as both owners and participants in learning processes and activities." —**A learning and development manager in a multinational financial services firm based in South America**

- ▶ “We have built an internal awards program that rewards the application of learning in problem solving.”
—**CEO of a national nonprofit healthcare organization**
- ▶ “Continuous access to resources and tools, conferences, and forums that expand awareness, networking, and engagement in focused areas of development. Organic and structured learning—both matter.”
—**COO of a global private education firm**
- ▶ “Creating a buddy system that provides a safe, nonauthoritative mentoring program. Newer employees are paired with more senior employees who do not supervise them and who can be used as resources for learning and conduits to answers.” —**C-level leader in a national consumer services company**
- ▶ “Each person does a self-assessment on the skills, knowledge, and abilities for their job, which creates a personalized learning plan for them containing specific activities and materials they can reference for improvement. We use this information (and periodic updates) to assign people to projects, help them learn where they have gaps, and encourage them to mentor others where they have strengths. Each person has the opportunity to teach the team something they know well.” —**Managing partner of a global software firm**

PWCSA Joins Forces to Extend Learning Beyond Organizational Walls

The HR and organization development (OD) team overseeing learning at the Prince William County Service Authority (PWCSA) devised an innovative, collaborative approach that reinforces the learning culture within the water and wastewater utility, but also extends learning's reach far beyond organizational walls.

"Because we are only 300 people here at PWCSA, it can be difficult to make specialized learning timely and cost effective," says HROD Program Manager Marryam Chaudhry. "So we pioneered a solution that enables multiple utilities to pool resources and provide affordable development opportunities for group members."

Formed by PWCSA in 2009, the Northern Virginia Learning Center for Excellence for Water and Wastewater Utilities—the NOVA Center for Excellence—is a consortium of 15 water and wastewater utilities in the Northern Virginia area. "We wanted to partner with other local jurisdictions that had similar training needs," says Chaudhry. "Because we created the consortium, our deputy general manager heads it. Members from two other organizations also contribute to leadership, and we have an education committee on which I serve along with peers from other member utilities."

Certifications are just one example of the cost savings facilitated by NOVA. "If we had to do a certification or licensure class that was pivotal for the organization and for licensed or certified employees to keep their jobs, we could encounter a challenge," says Chaudhry. "If a class isn't scheduled before the license will expire, we can schedule one. But a certain number of participants may be required. If we don't have enough employees who need the class, we'd have to pay for empty seats. Instead, we can open the class to consortium members whose workers also need to renew licenses. Each member may send only a few participants, but the total makes up a full class, costs are shared, and money isn't wasted on empty seats."

PWCSA, which has dedicated well-equipped training facilities in house, often hosts consortium training classes, and a training calendar for the group is established each year. Learning content may be contributed by member utilities or contracted through external vendors for specialized technical courses.

"Not only does NOVA support employees who need to obtain or renew industry-related licenses and certifications," says Chaudhry, "it helps PWCSA meet one of its goals of becoming a high-performing learning organization. We have an extensive learning culture internally, and the consortium enables us to learn from our partners in NOVA as well."

RECOMMENDATIONS

While most organizations don't have robust cultures of learning in place at present, the Study found that many have instituted elements that contribute to the learning-centric environments they envision. Organizations that perform strongly in the marketplace proved to be well ahead of their lower-performing counterparts in almost every aspect of establishing and growing cultures of learning.

Recommendations

ATD and i4cp offer recommendations—presented below as strategies for leaders, employees, organizations, and learning functions—in support of learning cultures. The strategies are based on the research-identified practices of high-performance organizations and on the insights and experiences contributed by the learning leaders who took part in the Study.

Strategies for Leaders

- ▶ **Ask leaders to teach others.** The top benefit associated with leaders-as-teachers programs is support for cultures of learning. Better market performance is linked to leaders teaching, too. For ideas and how-tos, see the 2015 ATD and i4cp study *Leaders as Teachers: Engaging Employees in High-Performance Learning*.
- ▶ **Draft leaders as L&D advisers.** Booz Allen Hamilton's approach of convening a governance board taps into leaders' intimate knowledge of business strategy and helps ensure that learning investments target initiatives likely to positively affect business results.
- ▶ **Hold leaders accountable for actively demonstrating the importance of learning.** Leaders participating in learning events, demonstrating hands-on application of skills, nominating employees for specific learning programs, and discussing ways in which new knowledge supports business objectives are a few examples of actions that provide the kind of visible reinforcement for learning that is strongly tied to market performance. See the sidebar for more ideas about getting leaders involved.

How Leaders Can Take Action

For leaders who want to support learning cultures, Antoinette Handler, corporate vice president of human resources for business technology firm Avanade, offers suggestions:

- ▶ Reinforce key behaviors in the workplace: intellectual curiosity, fast failure, and managing change.
- ▶ Role model to cast the right shadows to teams.
- ▶ Foster models of experiential and just-in-time learning.
- ▶ Advocate a 70-20-10 model with 70 percent of learning occurring on the job.
- ▶ Provide ongoing coaching and feedback, both positive and constructive.
- ▶ Establish robust individual development plans and monitor at least quarterly.
- ▶ Provide leadership support for employees' ownership of their own development.

Strategies for Employees

- ▶ **Encourage employee knowledge sharing and make it easy to do.** Workers in high-performance companies are four times more likely to share knowledge with their colleagues. Make it easy—even fun—for employees to create and share learning content. Marriott's mobile app is an easy-to-use platform that enables associates to snap photos of real-world work situations, identify opportunities to provide excellent customer service, and share that learning content worldwide.
- ▶ **Personalize development plans for every employee and reward workers for learning.** Tailoring development plans for each worker creates a concrete mechanism to demonstrate how individual jobs connect to organizational business results, which is an important linkage that high-performance companies make. Only about one in four organizations create IDPs for their employees, turning the strategy into an advantage for building learning cultures.
- ▶ **Add accountability for learning to employees' performance expectations.** To kick off a learning culture at PWCSA, General Manager Dean Dickey mandated 40 hours of training per year for every employee. Once the culture was established and thriving, the number of mandatory hours was reduced. At the same time, other processes were initiated to perpetuate advocacy for learning and the learning environment. For instance, career paths have associated curriculums employees must complete, along with stringent testing before they can move on to the next level. For some positions, test results are linked to employee performance evaluations.

Strategies for Organizations

- ▶ **Leverage the power of learning in talent sourcing and hiring processes.** Take a cue from market-leading companies that are nearly three times more likely to use learning and development opportunities to attract talent, and six times more likely to discuss those opportunities during hiring interviews. Marriott promotes L&D options on its website, through its social media outreach, and during candidate interviews. PWCSA references specific learning opportunities in employment offer letters.
- ▶ **Make time for learning.** Even such high-performance organizations as SAP acknowledge that finding time for learning can be challenging. Yet overall, top companies ensure the availability of learning time during the workday at twice the rate of lower performers. To accomplish that, some organizations mandate a minimum number of training hours per employee. Others include learning among workers' specified performance goals. Communicating the availability of learning time is important, as is publicizing learning opportunities through organizational communication channels.
- ▶ **Use learning to engage and retain valued employees.** Only about a third of organizations overall use learning and development opportunities as engagement and retention tools. Both strategies are strongly correlated to market performance and are leveraged by high-performance companies at up to four times the rate of lower performers. To engage and retain top talent, PWCSA sends select high-potential employees to an intensive, utility-specific executive leadership course at the University of North Carolina. In addition, a small group of top performers is attending a pilot training program that aims to further the organization's coaching culture and develop leaders who can actively build capability for new ways of working.

PWCSA uses L&D as an engagement and retention tool in another way, too. Chaudhry explains: "We are trying to innovate as much as we can, drawing on expertise, keeping people engaged. People want career advancement, but since we are only 300 people it can be frustrating if you have to wait for someone to leave in order to advance. To keep people motivated, we have created 11 career paths in the organization, and employees have the opportunity to develop even if there are no positions available. They can qualify for pay increases and advance in their careers without having to wait for someone to vacate a higher-classified position in their career series. For example, a customer service representative I can become a customer service representative II through added learning, development, and testing."

Strategies for Learning Functions

- ▶ **Make L&D a valued partner in organizational talent or workforce planning initiatives.** Among the most powerful learning-culture-supportive practices of high-performance organizations is participation by their L&D functions in planning processes. The aim of those efforts is the identification of the talent and skills (and detection of any gaps therein) necessary to execute organizational strategies and drive business results currently and in the future. In some organizations, learning professionals sit on workforce planning teams. In others, planning participation happens at a higher level, with learning leaders taking part in formulating business and talent strategies alongside other top executives.
- ▶ **Ensure close alignment of business strategy and learning strategy.** Having representation of the learning function in strategic business planning aids L&D in creating a learning strategy that is tightly aligned with business objectives—an element Study participants labeled as essential to a culture of learning.

While more than half of high-performing organizations already make alignment a focus, nine out of 10 say they could do a better job. If learning participation in strategy formulation at the executive level is not an option, consider approaches used by Booz Allen Hamilton and SAP, where a governance body and a global managing board, respectively, provide vital links to and visibility into business strategy.

- ▶ **Measure what matters most.** L&D functions in high-performance organizations are far better than their lower-performing competitors at consistently measuring learning activity and effectiveness. In particular, emphasis on impact measures—metrics that gauge learning’s business impact and its success in driving desired behaviors—are game changers for high-performance companies.

At Merck, metrics are defined during the development stages of learning programs. “The program and the associated investment involved trigger the type of measurement to be done,” Montalvo explains. “If programs are geared to transform, we want to be able to measure Kirkpatrick Level 3, Level 4, and perhaps Level 5. We also have a process that specifies how to collect learning-program data and report metrics on the impact we have on the business.”

Booz Allen Hamilton’s Romulus offers an additional perspective on measurement: “I think there’s an opportunity to measure different factors that actually show business impact. One of the things I want to begin measuring is leadership engagement in the process because I think it will reflect impact on the business. In addition to our own learning metrics, engagement and accountability will drive a different level of impact for the organization.”

Final Words of Advice on Learning Cultures

“As a whole, many people don’t understand the value of L&D. You can mandate training, but really it’s all about mindset. If you are in training because you have been mandated to do it, you won’t approach that learning with an open mind. Once you explain how training is going to benefit them, employees see that the organization is investing in their growth. L&D functions should focus more on mindsets and changing how people think about learning.”

—**Marryam Chaudhry, Prince William County Service Authority**

“We owe it to employees and to the business to raise L&D standards to make sure that anytime anybody is learning something it’s impactful and it’s measured.”—**Manette Chadwick, SAP**

“By their very nature, organizations that have a learning culture are on a continuous-improvement path. Developing people is simply how they operate. It’s ingrained and integrated in daily processes. It’s how you do things as a firm, as an organization. It’s how you think. And that drives the type of impact you see—you have better market share, increased retention, and employees who want to be there. You have a better opportunity to impact the market and the issues that are top of mind for your clients because you’re focused on bringing the best of the organization to those clients. Leveraging the full power of the organization comes about through optimizing a culture of learning and development.”

—**Renee Romulus, Booz Allen Hamilton**

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The Association for Talent Development (ATD) is the world's largest professional membership organization supporting those who develop the knowledge and skills of employees, improve performance, and achieve results for the organizations they serve. Originally established in 1943, the association was previously known as the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD).

ATD's members come from more than 120 countries and work in public and private organizations in every industry sector. ATD supports talent development professionals who gather locally in volunteer-led U.S. chapters and international member networks, and with international strategic partners. For more information, visit www.td.org.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY OVERVIEWS

Target Survey Populations

The target survey population of the *Building a Culture of Learning: The Foundation of a Successful Organization* study were industry professionals from organizations of various sizes and industries. Participants represented organizations worldwide; nearly two-thirds had workforces of 1,000 or more. Overall, 882 people responded to the survey.

Survey Instruments

In this survey, multiple questions used the customary 1–5 Likert-type scale, with a 1 rating generally indicating a “not at all” response and a 5 rating indicating a response of “to a very high extent.” The survey was composed of a total of 14 questions, including those geared toward the demographics of respondents.

Procedure

Research took a blended approach, combining survey results with subsequent interviews of learning leaders in organizations with a culture of learning. A link to an online survey was emailed to the target population in October 2015. Telephone interviews were also conducted in November and December.



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