



It takes a village—How you can boost integrated learning across departments

Today, more than ever, organizations are focused on making the most of every asset they have. That includes better exploiting their intellectual property and selling more to their network of customers. It also includes enabling their employees to do more and have easier access to critical knowledge. An enterprise's people have never been more important to its success, something that executives and managers increasingly understand. They are looking to their Learning and Development (L&D) departments for help, asking L&D to take a lead in ensuring relevant competence and knowledge throughout the enterprise and beyond. This white paper looks at just how L&D can answer the needs of these organizational leaders—by building employee skills for rapid business impact.

In the past, the learning and development profession has seen fads focused on both technologies such as mobile learning and virtual worlds and on methodologies such as blended learning. This paper argues that these technologies and methods are only individual components of a broader approach to organizational learning, an approach, which some companies are already deploying to great effect. In these organizations, frontline operations are supported by both management focus and by training delivery. The result: a new approach to organizational learning, with L&D directly serving key operations to deliver impact at the front line of the enterprise, and beyond. We call this approach “integrated learning.”

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Moving beyond blended learning

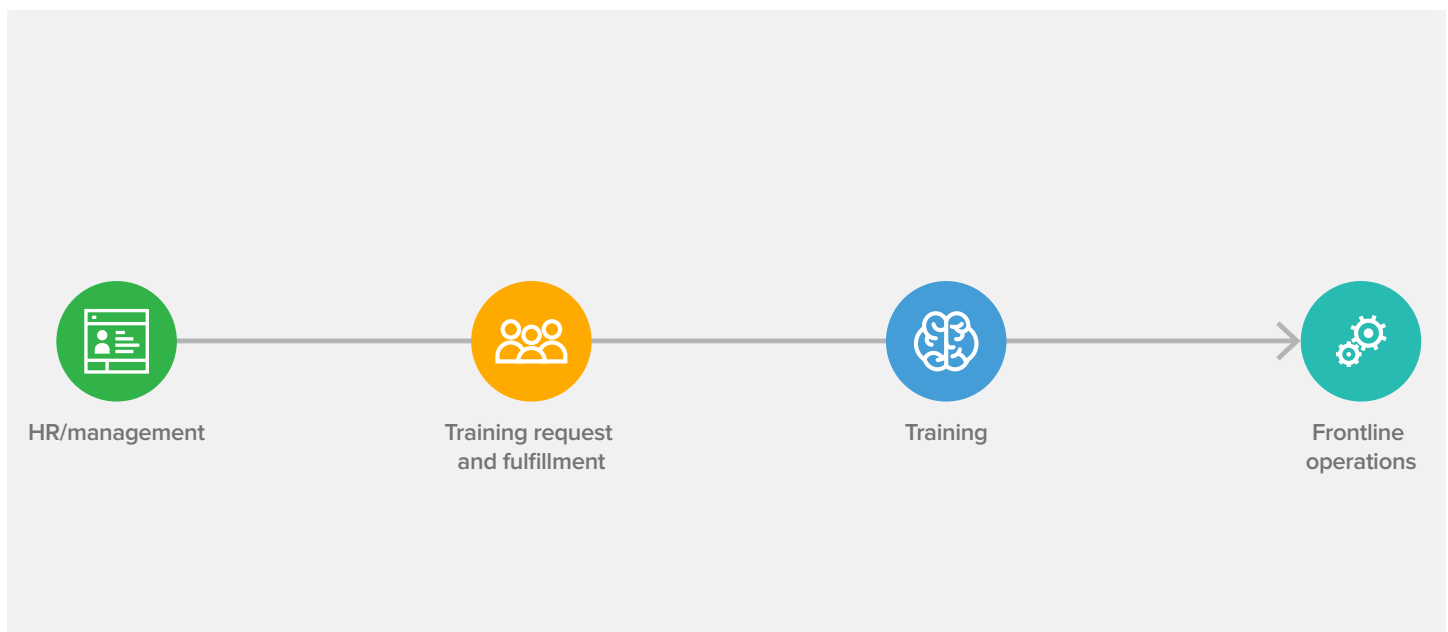
Traditionally, the training department was a service provider to the rest of the organization. Largely, it was only concerned with providing courses at the request of HR and management. Its focus, therefore, was on internal efficiency—in particular, on making classroom delivery as efficient as possible. Indeed, most organizations still train in this way, but this isolated form of training delivery, slow to respond to business need, no longer provides training that is rapid or focused enough for today's world.

In time, as the training department changed into the learning and development (L&D) department, it became clear that L&D was about more than simply delivering training, and that learning could occur outside the classroom.

The result was “blended learning.” At first nothing more than a classroom course with the addition of a book or some online reading materials, blended learning has rapidly become the standard delivery mechanism for learning materials in most organizations. It remains, however, just that: a delivery mechanism, not an integral part of the organization.

Today, this style of blended learning is no longer enough, not by itself. It focuses on delivery rather than on results, and on materials, not performance. The successful L&D department of today is not a separate body from the rest of the organization, like the traditional training department. It works closely with other departments. In particular it has close links with front line operational departments such as Sales and Production, where enhanced performance has a direct effect on organizational effectiveness. It also works closely with leadership to meet organizational goals.

Going beyond blended learning takes the L&D department into integrated learning.



Understanding integrated learning

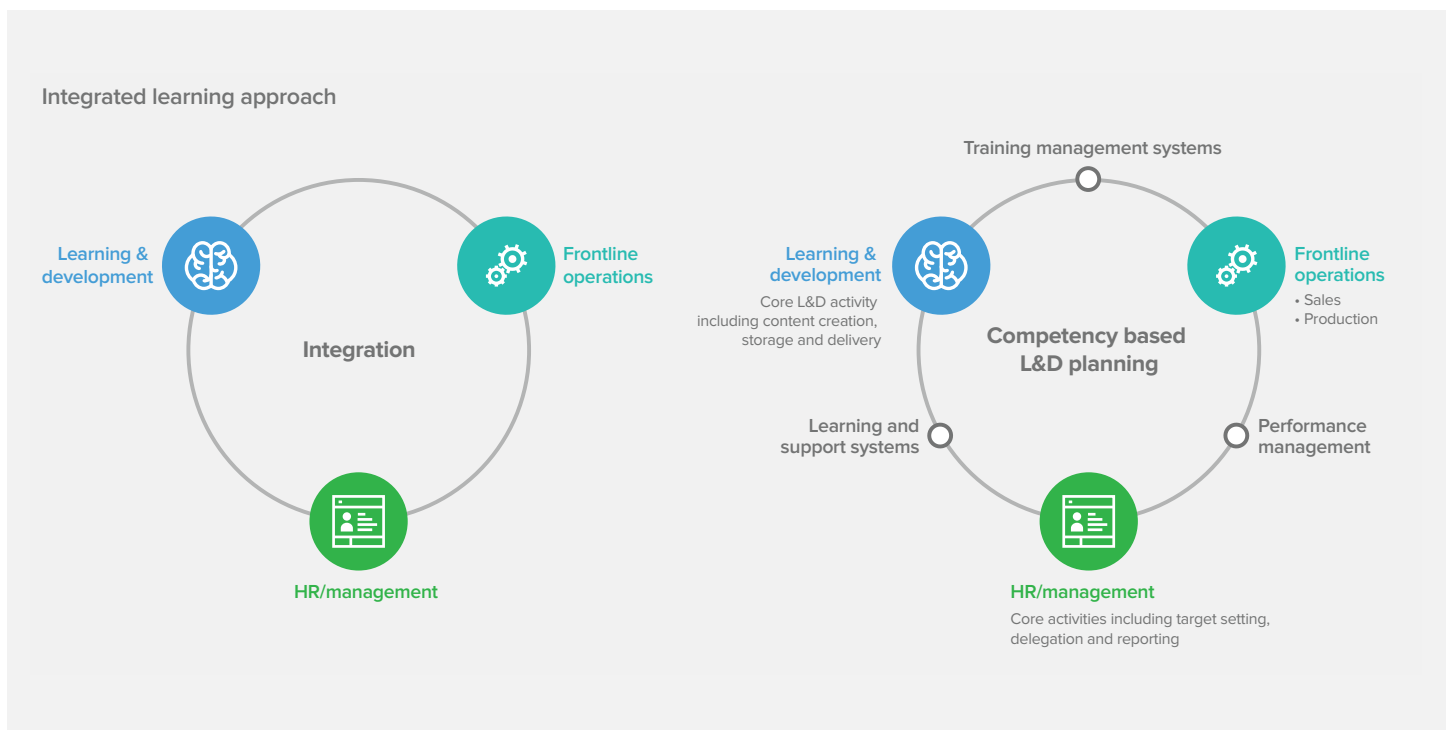
Integrated learning helps organizations remain effective by putting the knowledge of the organization to work faster than traditional classroom training, and by ensuring at the same time that the skills and knowledge delivered are entirely relevant to organizational goals. Integrated learning, therefore, includes the blended learning approach to delivery and goes beyond it, incorporating organizational goals as a key driver to its activity.

In an integrated approach to learning, each area concentrates on its own core role and the L&D department supports the other departments as appropriate, for example:

While blended learning focuses on the delivery mechanism of training, integrated learning focuses on the performance results of the organization. The top priority is improving the effectiveness of those in frontline operations, the people who have the most effect organizational success.

Although a systematic integration of corporate goals into learning is core to integrated learning, this does not mean that an integrated approach requires massive investment in systems. Some technology is required, but it is as important to invest in understanding the needs of the rest of the organization, and working with it.

The key factor behind successful integrated learning is the attitude of the L&D department. It has to be a department that steps outside its own domain. Integrated learning begins with conversations with the other departments (sales, operations, production, marketing, etc.) that make up the organization, and make it a success.



Implementing integrated learning in your organization

Integrated learning involves taking learning from the province of L&D out into other departments. The result is pervasive learning throughout an enterprise. But it is only possible for L&D to do this effectively by focusing on what unites it with these other departments: the goals of the organization, and achieving them as rapidly as possible.

1. Focus on results and speed

The front line operations in your organization have targets to meet and will work closely with an L&D initiative that helps them achieve those targets rapidly. Technology-based delivery of training is one area where L&D can now help the organization reach its targets far more rapidly than before. With this focus on speed, it is essential that as little time as possible is spent in deployment of learning technologies, so that the benefits of any system can be realized as quickly as possible.

Increasingly, the need is to train not only employees within the organization, but also the “extended enterprise”—partners and colleagues in associated bodies. As companies move to a decentralized work model in which more and more contributors and partners are off-site (or overseas), training must have a global reach to keep knowledge easily accessible.

2. Integrate with management

In the past, the training department was able to work to its own schedule, producing courses for the organization to consume, knowing that the content would match the largely unchanged needs of the business. With today’s rapid rate of change, this method is inadequate. Instead, L&D has to work closely with organizational management and leadership to ensure not only that the right content is developed, but also that it is deployed in ways that meet the sometimes conflicting needs of the organization—with the conflict usually being between a need for skills on the job, and minimal time taken off it.

Integrated learning rests on four crucial pillars:

- **A focus on results and speed**—Move L&D’s focus from training delivery to employee performance and their impact on business. Frontline operations care about only one thing: employees doing a great job delivering results. L&D’s expertise is in providing the right route to get them there.
- **Management integration**—Work with business management to achieve results. That means engaging with managers from other departments to understand their aims and procedures, and then building both a learning program for your organization and a plan for its adoption. Both will need management buy in to succeed.
- **Learner integration**—Your adoption plan will encourage learners to see that what they are learning is valuable. But treat them the right way. Learners have never been passive recipients to be filled up with knowledge, so use the tools, which now exist to build collaboration, especially online, into the learning process.
- **Technology support**—Any reasonably sized organization will need technology to make the integrated learning approach work. In the current, risk-averse climate, however, that technology needs to be well tested, an excellent value and rapid to deploy. You will have to show that the results of your initiative can be harvested early.

Understanding organizational goals and meeting them quickly is one area in which it is crucial to integrate with management. Another is working intelligently with existing management procedures and information. For example, the executive may have called in external specialists to build a competency framework for the organization. It might be tempting to try to incorporate the entire framework into L&D operations, to provide a complete mapping of courses to the competencies identified as organizationally essential. It would be tempting, but not the best use of valuable time.

This is a process that could take months. Instead, work with management to understand where the introduction of competencies into L&D could have the greatest effect. Probably the core 20% of competencies, applied to L&D for the essential 20% of frontline personnel will make a substantial difference to frontline results.

3. Integrate with learners

There are two essential ways to integrate L&D with learners.

The first is to encourage their contribution. Adding learner input not only boosts the content available in a system, it also increases learning through stronger engagement. Collaborative technologies such as blogs, wikis, Microsoft Sharepoint, and WebEx are now part of many people's working lives, and they expect to be able to use them in e-learning.

However, remember the needs to focus on speed and results. Any time spent integrating this technology with other systems is time not spent delivering results. Instead, look for learning platform technologies that already incorporate collaborative functionality and are pre-configured to integrate with other tools such as WebEx. This means you don't have to pay for integration. More importantly, though, it means you can keep focused on results.

A larger, crucial part of integration with learners is your adoption plan. When introducing any learning to an organization, include these points in your plan to ensure that your learners are on board:

- Understand your audience.
- Build champion groups.
- Go for quick wins.
- Get expert help and funding.
- Build credibility and kudos internally.
- Get external recognition.
- Maintain the motivation.

4. Support by technology

None of the above is possible without technology—but what technology? The need to focus on speed and results means that whatever technology is deployed, it must:

- Be quick to deploy.
- Be fairly priced.
- Be manageable by the L&D department, not by external consultants.
- Include the functionality you need, not the bells and whistles you don't.
- Include training tailored to the functionalities that will be used.
- Incorporate collaborative learning tools.
- Integrate with third-party learning tools such as WebEx.

With good technology support, it is possible to make the transition from the traditional training department to integrated learning:

As can be seen, moving from fully blended learning to integrated learning rests in part on the right approach, particularly working with departments outside L&D. It also rests on the right technology, in particular on adequate content creation and control, via a well-featured learning center management system (LCMS).

Why is learning content management so important for integrated learning? For two reasons. First, because the content of any learning program must be high quality. Regardless of the ability of an LMS to deliver content and track its usage, it is the actual learning content that will determine the success or failure of a learning program.

The second reason why a good LCMS is essential for

	Traditional training	Traditional e-learning	Simple blended	Fully Blended	Integrated	Technology & other support required
Classroom courses	Present		Present	Present	Present	Training management
Online courses		Present	Present	Present	Present	LMS
Books	Present		Present	Present	Present	Resource management
Online reference		Present	Present	Present	Present	LMS
Other online materials				Present	Present	LMS
Use of web tools				Present in some cases	Present	Blogs, wikis, webinars
Design lengthy & bespoke		Present	Present	Present in some cases		Various tools
Design rapid through use of templates	Present			Present in some cases	Present	LCMS
Content reused in different media				Present	Present	LCMS
Content production driven by L&D	Present	Present	Present	Present in some cases		
Content production follows business need				Present in some cases	Present	
Integrated production & delivery tools				Present in some cases	Present	LCMS
L&D team focused on administration	Present	Present	Present	Present		
L&D team focused on performance					Present	LCMS
LMS systems integrated with HR					Present	Integration tool kit
L&D in regular dialog with management					Present	Great, clear reports
Learning extended to partners					Present	Web based delivery
Learning extended to clients					Present	Web based delivery

■ Present LMS: Learning Management System
■ Present in some cases LCMS: Learning Content Management System

integrated learning is that learning content creation is one of the core functions of the L&D department. Staff will spend a lot of time on content. If, to do their jobs, they also have to deal with maintaining a range of different products and integrating their input into an LMS, that is time wasted, time not spent interacting with the business.

Given that most organizations already have some learning systems in place, how does this help or hinder them in moving to integrated learning?

Many L&D departments work with homegrown systems, combinations of tools and content brought together over time. Such organizations will want to consider replacing these time-consuming combinations of tools with an all-in-one system that includes the LMS and LCMS functionality that they need to move to integrated learning.

The system must be able to import existing learner data and course content.

Organizations that already have an LMS in place have until recently faced a similar choice: to strip out the LMS and replace it with a more comprehensive solution, or to try to make it work in conjunction with a variety of content management tools that combine LMS capability with a sophisticated learning content management system (LCMS). Managed using web services, the integration process is fast to set up and easy and low-cost to maintain.

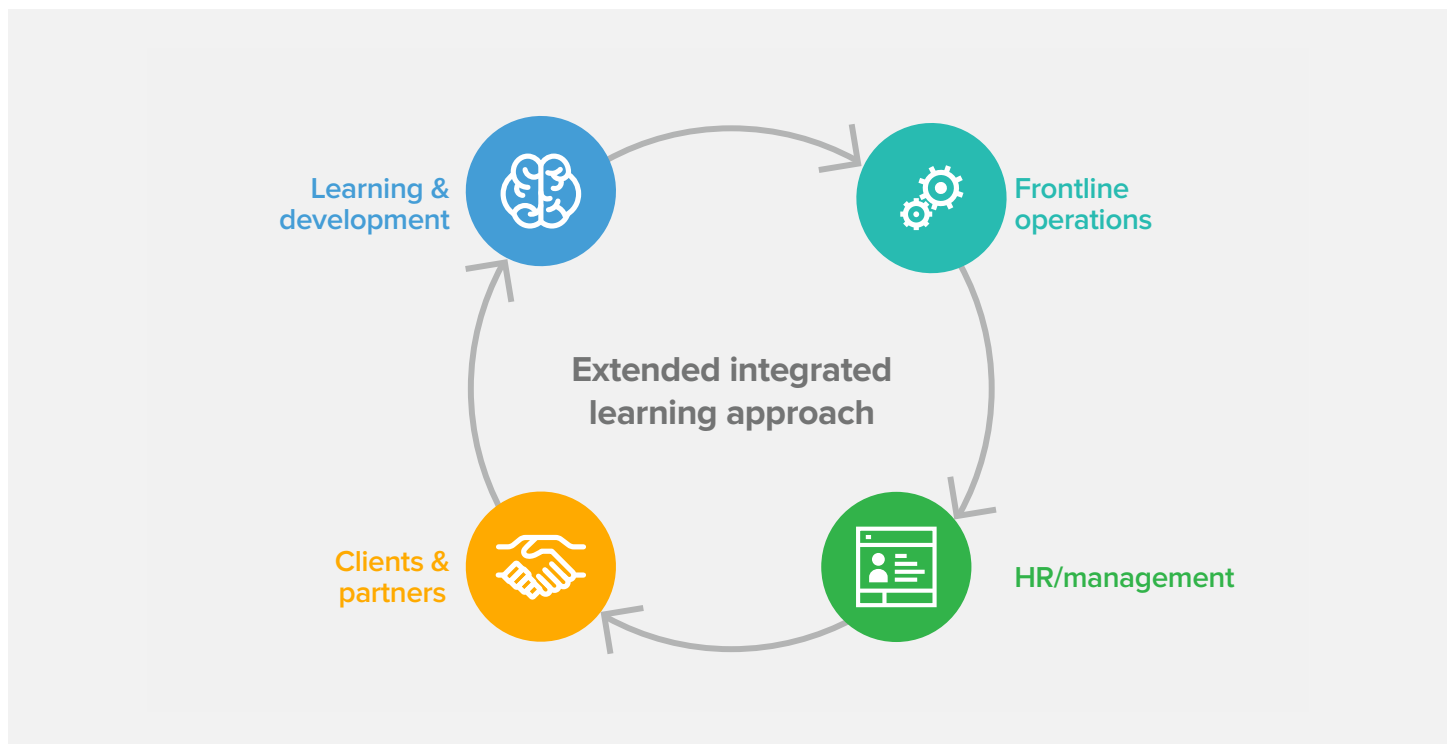
Working together with other departments will lead, eventually, to demands for other forms of integration. Any learning system must also be able to work with your existing legacy HR and ERP software, because sooner or later you may be asked to establish a link between the two. Nobody wants two systems carrying personnel data, and a system that is open to integration with, for example, SAP and Oracle/ PeopleSoft will enable you to save your own time and to leverage the investment your organization has already made.

Learning beyond the enterprise

Companies have extended their L&D operations beyond their own organizations and included partners in the extended enterprise. This is in the keeping with the online world, where people expect openness and transparency, and easily accessible information.

Innovative organizations are now going further, using their LMS to open up their learning not only to partners, but also to clients. This is using L&D not merely to support the frontline, but to extend it. Giving clients direct access to quality learning about products and services not only reduces support and maintenance calls, it enhances customer loyalty and sets competitors a barrier to entry.

This approach of extending learning to clients as well as its partners leads to a larger view of integrated learning.



Supporting integrated learning

Integrated learning is essential to meeting the needs of modern organizations in both the public and private sectors. Integrated learning has three hallmarks. Learning and development, although still controlled centrally by the L&D department, is integrated into the operations of the business. This results in the second characteristic: a management-driven focus on speed and on results, on practical business results achieved in unison, rather than over-engineered systematic learning perfection produced in isolation.

Such close integration demands the third characteristic: integrated technological support, particularly of learning content. To be truly focused on speed, the L&D department cannot spend its time on implementation, administration and tinkering with technical maintenance of several different systems. Only with the right technical support can an organization truly benefit from integrated learning.

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