



FOSWAY
GROUP

Steering your learning strategy through volatile terrain

Beyond 'design and deliver' to ensure future relevance

Traditional assumptions about business strategy and effective leadership have been shaken as new sources of uncertainty, disruption and volatility impact all markets. Every enterprise function is under pressure to respond strategically and provide real value to stakeholders. Equally, the relevance of familiar solutions to these fresh challenges can no longer be relied upon.

For corporate learning, a coherent and consistent method and mindset is required to rise above the 'design and deliver' model and offer a true people development service - one which responds quickly to current needs, is fit for the future and flexible enough to sustain business impact in the long term.

This Fosway viewpoint paper outlines the critical reasons business leaders require a response to these challenges, the implications for corporate learning services and how they can enable their organisations to thrive through uncertainty.

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Why is this important?

Multiple sources of disruption create deep uncertainties

Volatility and uncertainty have become constants for business leaders. Rarely, however, have such a range and depth of pressures on enterprises arisen simultaneously and in such quick succession.

Added to the more familiar yet intense pressures of competition, pandemic recovery and sustainability are supply chain disruption, energy security and price inflation. In people terms, the nature of work itself continues to shift. Expectations from workforces of their employers are rising whilst the range of skills required to compete grows. Digital fatigue is persistent. Research from Microsoft suggests that some workers spend as much as two days per week managing email and in meetings¹. Fosway's research echoes this with 40% of learning professionals stating that digital learning fatigue has become more of a problem².

As digital transformation continues, the onrush of powerful artificial intelligence technologies shows disruptive potential as well as great promise. Whilst precise impacts are too early to call, the speed of change is being further accelerated.

Traditional models of learning are no longer sufficient

Corporate learning has survived largely on a diet of programme design and delivery. Business leaders have been confident in their problem diagnosis and accepted this trusted approach. Whilst always part of the mix, richer and more varied options are needed in response to the pace of change. Our research³ identifies the top three people initiatives to future proof organisations to 2025:

- Skills/capability bridging and enablement
- Empowering ALL talent and liberating ALL potential

¹ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/will-ai-fix-work>

² Digital Learning Realities 2023

³ HR Realities Research 2022: <https://www.fosway.com/research/next-generation-hr/hr-realities-research-2022/>

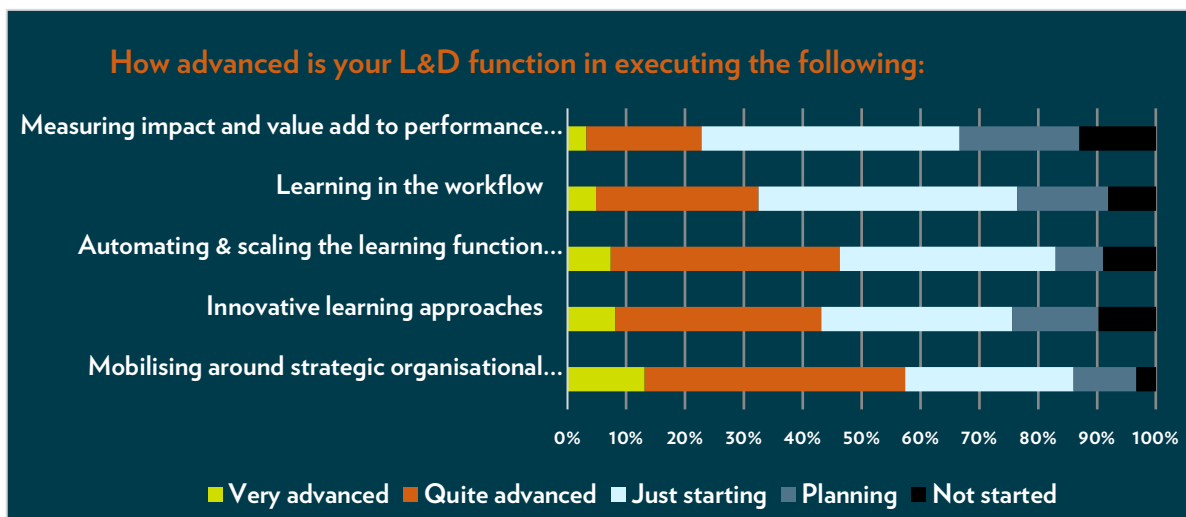


- Lifelong learning and resilience

These indicate a scale and complexity beyond a programme led approach alone. Reaching all sources of talent and potential requires being insight and intelligence led, with a personal touch across organisation boundaries. The imperative to skill and reskill workforces continuously requires a capability and toolset that can accurately benchmark current skill levels and target gaps against required potential. Supporting organisations as their people learn together is also a requisite.

Many learning functions lack the foundations to ensure future relevance

This new reality must be met with an agility and responsiveness not always familiar to L&D. True business partnership, from a strategic learning service, is needed but these foundations are weak in the profession as a whole. Our research indicates that only 44% of organisations have a C-Suite that sees people development as central to success⁴. A weak connection with strategic decision makers leaves learning leaders exposed.



Fosway Group - Digital Learning Realities - 2023

Similarly, those claiming to be advanced at executing on strategic priorities, assessing impact and working at scale are rare in our research. A raising of sights is needed to apply a broader set of solutions and ways of working.

⁴ Digital Learning Realities Research 2023

⁵ Digital Learning Realities Research 2023

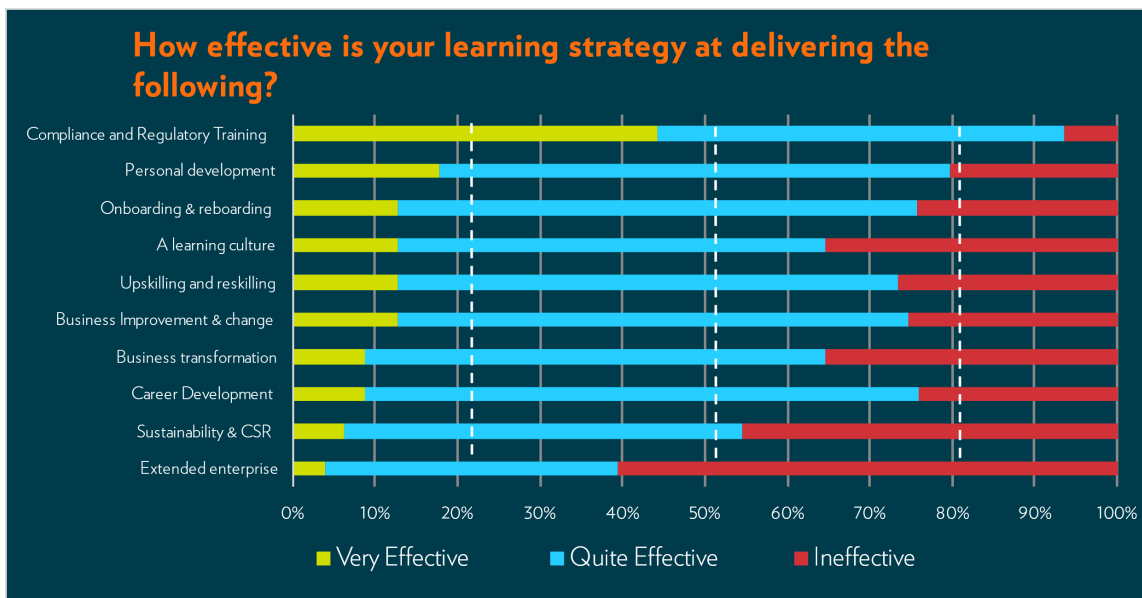


What should you do?

Learning teams need to embrace the unfamiliar

Our research indicates the focus on routine training activity is at the expense of effectiveness in more strategic solution areas.

Reporting of a very effective score for compliance training, at 46%, is over three times higher than upskilling and reskilling (13%) and business transformation (11%) and over twice that of business improvement (16%). These are the delivery areas that will place the learning service as a valuable partner to strategic decision makers.



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A similar picture is revealed in the design tactics and methods most often employed. E-learning course usage is at an advanced stage for 36% of learning professionals, with virtual classrooms and assessments at 21% and 19% respectively. Approaches less closely associated with more traditional programme design and delivery have fared poorly: 10% are advanced with spaced learning, 7% with immersive experiences and 4% with social channels. 66% are yet to use chatbot assistants for learning, indicating the distance yet to travel for the new breed of AI tools. When designed well, these lesser used approaches can be more effective than traditional techniques and even stronger when blended into a digital learning journey. They are crucial to establishing and sustaining fresh relevance.



Whilst systems alone are not the answer, there is still work to do. 52% do not think that their current learning platforms are fit for the modern workforce. Corporates must clearly articulate the problems they aim to solve to raise sights above tech implementation and guide vendors to areas of most value.

Shift from systems and content to personal experience

The traditional tactics identified in our research stem from a learning model concentrated on assigning courses and content to audiences and the systems created to do that efficiently. There is a rigidity to that efficiency however, at a time when agility and intelligence are required. A mature learning service will create strong relationships with learners at an individual level, responding to emerging needs.

Whilst there is a clear digital thread running along the path to maturity, the key to progress is identifying the right problems to solve and describing them clearly. Learning teams must head upstream of their design activity to understand what the real business issues are and why they are important. Equally vital is what these mean to individuals – what motivates them about those issues. Throughout the experiences created, insight into learner behaviours must support the guidance and feedback needed. This insight should then be carried downstream to monitor and analyse impact.

“Manage user experiences from end to end and front to back.”

An effective service is not only defined by the learning experience. Service designers often apply the principle of *“managing experience from end to end and front to back”*. This is helpful guidance for learning teams. The infrastructure and operations around all learner interactions need to be clearly aligned to ensure smooth running at each step – from the back of the stack to the whole user interface.

Intelligent and timely nudges need a joined-up toolset and data sources to be accurate and timely, for example. In many enterprise settings this will need ready support from the owners of all the tools and products that make up the whole service, internal and external.



Manage an ecosystem of products and tools

No single system can satisfy everything a modern enterprise needs from an effective learning service. Historically, the learning toolset has not always offered a seamless experience for learners or administrators. As the need to share content, transfer data and connect workflows increases, an ecosystem approach is a requirement, not a preference.

Layers of the Learning Ecosystem

Learner Experience										
Formal Learning Portals	Workflow Learning Portals	Collaboration & Social Portals	Learning Solution Aggregation	Learning Engagement	Learner Relationship & Nudge	Bots	System of Work / Digital Workflow	Career & Internal Mobility		
Delivery & Performance Touchpoints										
Virtual Classroom	Formal & Workflow Assessment	Chatbot Support	Work Collaboration Tools	Just In Time Resources	Microlearning	Performance Support	Workflow Performance Optimisation	Feedback, Coaching & Mentoring	Mobile	Search
Content Management										
Learning Content Management	Content Authoring	User Generated, Social Collaboration & Sharing	Video & Asset Management	Content Deployment	Content Repository	Content Curation	Knowledge Management			
Learning Management										
Audience & Community Management	Structured Learning Programme	Curriculum Management	Blended Learning Management	Capability & Competency Management	Performance Management	Course & Resource Management	Skills Management	Development Planning	Adaptive Learning Engine	Certification & Compliance Management
Training Management										
Training Resource Management	Training Budget Management	Event & Intervention Management	Training Logistics Optimisation	Training Financials & Cost Management						
Intelligence, Analytics & Decision Support										
Performance Measurement & Analytics	Skills & Capability Analysis	Data Cleansing & Integrity	Predictive Analytics	LRS & Learning Data Warehousing	Impact & ROI Analytics	Engagement Analytics	Business Data Integration / Data Warehousing			

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Not all organisations will require every element of these layers, but most are managing at least one element of each. It is easy to see how complexity emerges. Enterprise customers should look to their vendor partners to contribute to the connectedness of their ecosystem components and help to resolve potential fragmentation.

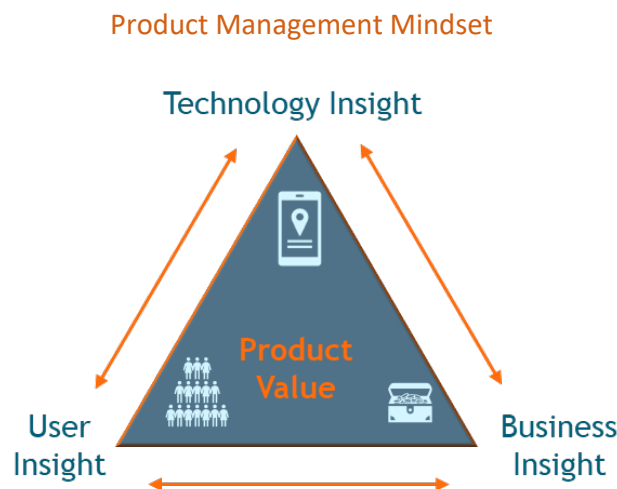
The industry has made some progress with a standards-led approach to support interoperability of products in the LMS arena, where 56% of corporates say their systems are very standardised⁶. But more effort is needed from all industry participants to reach beyond the learning management layer alone to the learner experience and performance touchpoints enabling the full range of solutions enterprises need.

⁶ Digital Learning Realities 2023



Innovate all solutions, not just technology

Innovation is the fuel for sustained relevance in digital learning. Beyond the excitement of novel technologies, new tools should be applied to solve existing problems for business stakeholders *and* employees. A product management mindset can guide innovation efforts. It balances what end users are trying to achieve with the possibilities of technology and the realities of what the business needs and can sustain.



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Nothing is set in stone, and the most successful products are managed with a constant sense of curiosity about how they can be refined and improved. This “build/measure/learn” approach of the product manager focuses on evidence of ongoing utility. Technology vendors and solution providers are crucial partners in this ongoing discovery. They have insights about sustainability and lessons from other customers. The best also add objectivity to internal perspectives.

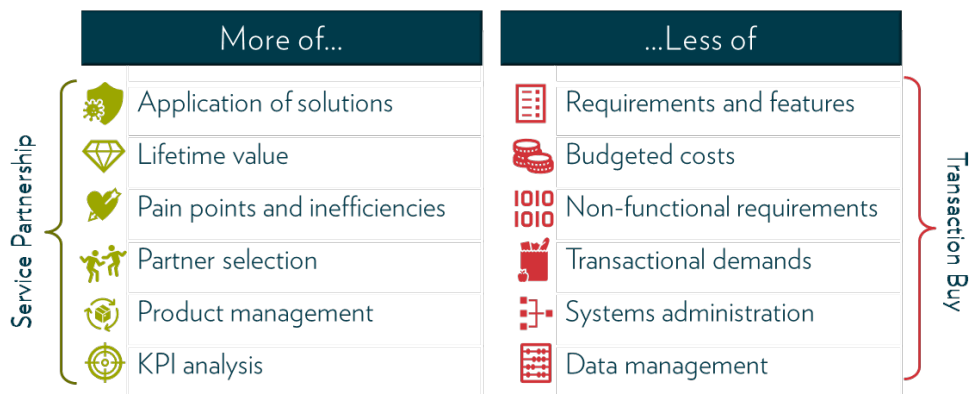
Innovation is not only a technology concern. There are opportunities to apply methods and approaches from other professions to L&D objectives. Behavioural science, design thinking and neuroscience, for example, are increasingly influential on learning design practice and bring rich bodies of research evidence to bear on the solution design. They add to the breadth and flexibility of solutions learning services can offer as the environment changes.



Be a strategic customer to encourage strategic suppliers

Few, if any, learning functions can span the range of required solutions and tools without external support. The right relationships with suppliers helps to keep pace and prepare for where most value can be achieved. Our research indicates⁷ that demand for digital learning platforms will continue to grow across the board. It also suggests a clear shift towards intelligence-led tools and the ability to empower employees with their development. Analytics tools, skills management platforms and social learning solutions are the top three platform types expected to grow in demand.

The evolving digital learning customer mindset



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As learning functions evolve to become people performance services, the demands they have on the supply chain change. From a history of managing systems to make content and events available to the management of performance solutions is a genuine transformation. Customers should look to a consultative approach to the sales process and a desire to uncover problems to be solved. They need to consider technology and solution services together and exploit the benefits of a close connection between them.

Vendors should press for an account of what good looks like and why it matters. This is not only about matching scale and complexity with infrastructure and resources (overlook that at your peril), it is also about demonstrating what high class service can achieve and expressing that with clarity.

⁷ Digital Learning Realities 2023



In Summary

The pressure is on for learning teams to support the response to the myriad of disruptive forces at play. Trusted, traditional methods and technology must be enhanced with a broader range of approaches and tools, managed with a holistic approach and a keen eye on demonstrable value.

Successful learning services will actively manage their solutions ecosystem, testing for new sources of value and leading vendors to problem solving outcomes. This new mindset will enable fresh connections with stakeholders and plot a clear route to real business value.

Recommended Fosway reading

For further Fosway analysis relating to this topic, please see the following papers or resources.

- [Fosway 9-Grid™ for Digital Learning 2023](#)
- [Digital Transformation, Agility and Learning](#)
- [HR Realities Research 2022](#)
- [The Reskilling Revolution](#)



Accelerate and De-risk

To talk to us about our research on learning and talent systems, or to discuss what it might specifically mean for your organisation please contact us directly.

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For over 25 years, we have been analysing the realities of the market, and providing insights on the future of HR, Talent and Learning. Fosway analysts work extensively with our corporate clients to understand the inside story of the challenges they are facing, and their real experiences with next gen strategies, systems and suppliers. Our independent vendor analysis also provides a vital resource when making decisions on innovation and technology.

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