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REIMAGINING L&D MEASUREMENT

You can only manage what you can measure

FEATURING INSIGHTS FROM

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MEASURING L&D

Learning & development professionals put their passion and energy into designing holistic learning programs that fit the different needs and expectations of employees throughout their companies. This careful attention to employee growth leads to better business outcomes and advances the success of the organization at every level.

The creativity put into every learning initiative is only growing as new technology leads to the development of innovative learning modalities. For instance, simulation-based programs, artificial intelligence, virtual/augmented reality and gamification are making strides in the learning industry. Learning programs must also be adaptable to hybrid work, bringing employees effective information and opportunities to collaborate over often-large distances.

However, the growing intricacy of learning initiatives also complicates measuring learner outcomes and learning program impact. This Special Report illustrates how L&D executives are currently measuring learning and the biggest challenges L&D executives face when collecting and interpreting learning data. It also reimagines L&D measurement by identifying new perspectives and approaches necessary in order to keep up with its complex evolution.

# THE PRESENT: HOW ARE L&D EXECUTIVES MEASURING LEARNING?

Modalities

Data has emerged as an essential and indispensable facet of L&D. The question that arises, then, is how do we collect this data? Surveys, analytics, artificial intelligence and LMS/LXP metrics have proven integral to collecting data, while advanced analytics, ROI studies and more are being used to analyze and measure it. Corporate Learning Network's August '22 survey of Heads of Learning at major organizations found that course completion rates and surveys were the top methods that L&D executives used to measure learning outcomes. When asked which learning platforms and/or modalities they were using to measure learning experiences, 85.71% of respondents selected engagement surveys and 78.57% of respondents selected course completion rates.

Artificial intelligence (21.43% of respondents) and advanced analytics (25.00% of respondents) were shown to be utilized as well, although at lower rates. Also utilized were grades, inclusion indexes, reaction surveys, LMS-derived data, performance-based metrics and ROI studies.

Fig. 1

Q1 Which Learning Analytics platforms/modalities have you used or are you currently using to measure your learning experiences? Select as many as apply.
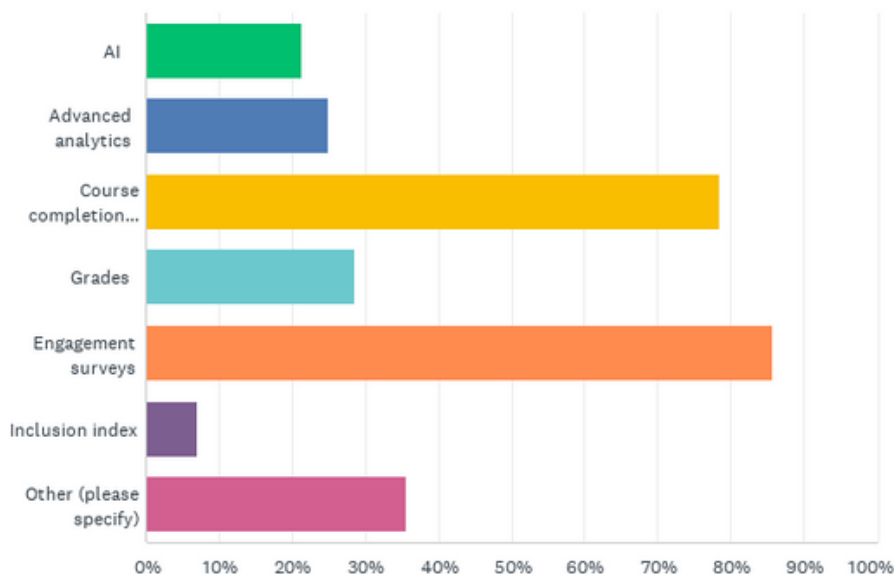
Methodologies

These are the modalities executives are using to measure learning, but what are the methodologies? There are various models that practitioners utilize in order to analyze training effectiveness. One such model for measuring L&D is the Kirkpatrick Model, which consists of four levels of training evaluation. Level one is Reaction, which refers to the employee's level of engagement with and perception of the value obtained from the learning material. Level two, Learning, is the actual skills and confidence gained from the training. Level three, Behavior, refers to the application of the learning to the job and level four, Results, refers to whether predicted results and outcomes are met.

There are a handful of other models that provide a step-by-step process through which to measure learning outcomes, although many are based on the Kirkpatrick Model. The CIRO Model, also comprised of four stages – Context, Input Reaction and Outcome – is utilized specifically for management training. The Phillips ROI Model, popularized by Jack Phillips in his book, *Return on Investment in Training and Performance*, is comprised of four levels that are highly similar to those of the Kirkpatrick Model, and one added level that looks at return on investment (ROI).

Robert O. Brinkerhoff's model, the Success Case Method, looks at how well learning programs perform in optimal conditions and for potential flaws that lead to learning programs failing. Kaufman's Model of Learning Evaluation splits Kirkpatrick's level one (Reaction) into two parts and adds a fifth level that looks at the training's effect on the company's customers and on society. Finally, the Anderson Model of Learning Evaluation is comprised of three stages and focuses on aligning learning with the organization's business goals.
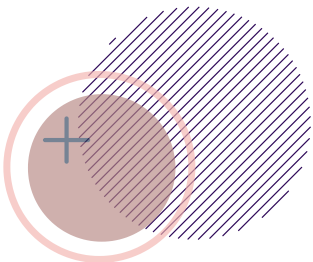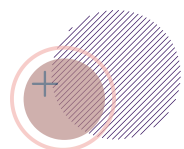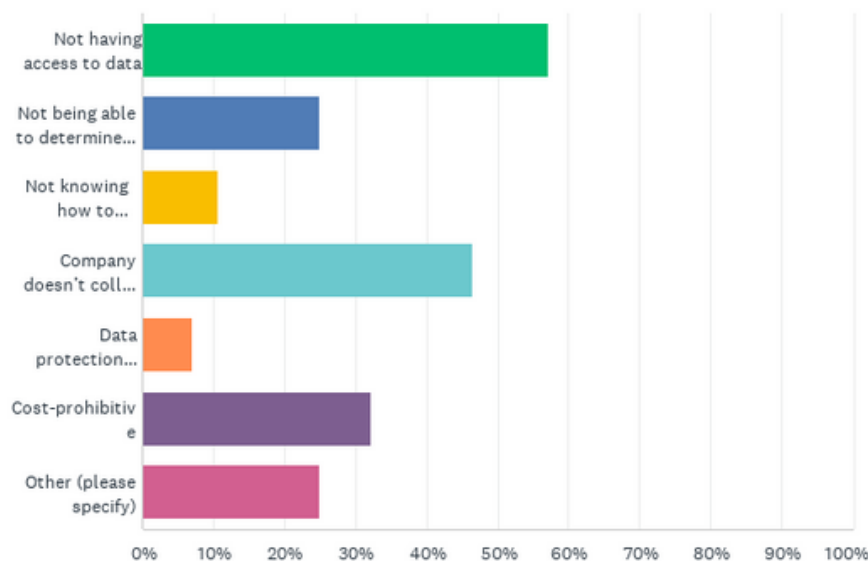
LEARNING MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES

Technical Challenges

Implementing learning analytics comes with both technical and social/communication challenges. On the technical side, putting in place a system to collect company-wide learning data is a major hurdle for many companies to overcome. 57.14% of respondents to CLN's August '22 survey noted that simply not having access to data was one of their biggest challenges when it came to implementing learning analytics. Similarly, 46.43% of respondents answered that inadequate data collection at their companies was an obstacle.

In addition to the several challenges displayed in Fig. 2, survey respondents also cited that a siloed business model, lack of time to prioritize learning analytics, lack of analytics resources, difficulty knowing what to measure and difficulty relating learning data to business results were problematic.

Fig. 2

Q9 What are your biggest challenges when implementing learning analytics? Select as many as apply.

Overcoming Transparency and Trust Issues With Data

While the technical aspects of measuring and analyzing data present challenges to L&D executives, creating a company culture in which learning is valued also introduces difficulties.

When it comes to staff having their learning outcomes measured, the biggest obstacle is fear, says Kevin Farrell, Director of Instructional Design & Development at Liberty Mutual.

"It's managing that initial apprehension of the team. The initial reaction from a lot of folks is fear and it's very normal. So, the biggest challenge is instilling confidence and saying that we're going to use common sense, but the bottom line is if we want to get this right, we have to measure ourselves the same way the business measures themselves. Otherwise, it really doesn't make a lot of logical sense."

**Kevin Farrell, Director, Instructional Design & Development, Liberty Mutual**

When introducing learning data tracking and measurement into learning programs, L&D executives may meet resistance from team members who fear that their progress being tracked could lead to negative consequences, especially when achieving specific KPIs is a goal. Employees may wonder if they will face consequences such as pay decreases or layoffs. This is why transparency is key when it comes to which metrics are being tracked and why.

"I like to tell people up front. What am I tracking? For instance, we look at how many individuals are creating a learning and development goal. We are not pulling out specifically what your learning and development goal is and sharing with anyone. That is for you and whomever you want to present that information to. You need to tell them what you're tracking, why you're tracking it and what you will not be sharing."

Benicia Stein, Director, Leadership Development, VMware
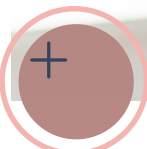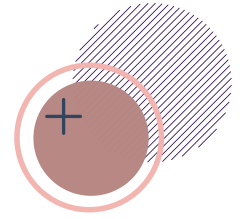
COLLECTING AND INTERPRETING ANALYTICS

The Scientific Method

When collecting and interpreting learning data, you can apply the same steps that comprise the scientific method. First, formulate a question. For instance, what type of training will effectively increase leadership skills in high-level management at your organization? After gathering data on which trainings may work based on past data at your company and past effectiveness of the training, create a hypothesis. For instance, you might postulate that a simulation course you are implementing will increase leadership skills over six months as reported by managers and directors.

Control groups are foundational and are utilized by many L&D executives when testing the hypothesis. It is also necessary to control for other environmental factors that could influence the outcome of the results, especially when evaluating specific KPIs. Then, the data can be analyzed, and a conclusion drawn based on the differential data between the control group and the experimental group.

When it comes to data analysis, not all L&D departments feel they have the resources available to analyze and display complex data sets. Cross-departmental collaboration can be key in this situation, particularly if the organization has an analytics department.

"We will often do control and test groups. When we introduce a program and we know what the KPIs are, we do pilots. Analytics loves that because it's control and test, right. You can basically have the same environment, but the groups are going through two different programs. We'll have existing programs running parallel [to new trainings]. [Working with analytics also furthers] your credibility as an organization because basically someone else is giving the feedback."

**Kevin Farrell
Director, Instructional Design & Development
Liberty Mutual**

Combining Learning Data and Performance Data

The learning measurement of the future merges learning data and performance data. It doesn't analyze only learning metrics, but also how they impact key performance indicators (KPIs) and ROI. Learning and performance data together provide advanced insight into specific employees in order to make business decisions, for example around promoting or internal mobility. Executives at organizations that endeavor to encourage internal mobility in the future need to know which employees possess the strongest skills in each area in order to best match them to open positions within the company.

> "Before promoting anyone, we're not just looking at performance data. We're also looking at learning data. We're marrying the two. The learning data and the performance data give you a better insight on a specific employee."
> **Dr. Eli Bendet-Taicher, Head of Global Learning and Development, Wix.com**

Skill-mapping, in which organizations use visual displays such as graphs or charts in order to easily conceptualize skill levels and gaps amongst staff members, is how Dr. Eli Bendet-Taicher, Head of Global Learning and Development at Wix.com, organizes data on learning and performance.

> "We created skill-mapping of all of our teams and once they do a soft skills training, they get badged to a certain skill. We match that with performance data. We see if there's any correlation between success in learning and performance. Once we have these two together, we can see about each employee and see if learning actually helped with performance or not."
> **Dr. Eli Bendet-Taicher, Head of Global Learning and Development, Wix.com**

This data also allows companies to calculate ROI based on the amount of money spent on the training and the skill-levels obtained.

MEASURING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS WITH ABILITIE

LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2019 report found that 80% of professionals surveyed said soft skills are increasingly integral to company success. These skills aren't simply "nice" qualities that make an organization an amiable place to work. On the contrary, these foundational skills directly drive business outcomes and lead to success. 92% said these types of skills are equally as important or more important than hard skills. Measuring hard skills or technical skills can appear less complex than measuring foundational skills. For instance, it is straightforward to offer sales training and then measure sales outcomes from a group that went through the training and a group that did not.

Furthermore, advanced technology and artificial intelligence are driving the automation of many technical skills. A 2018 McKinsey study found that over eight in 10 respondents were undertaking digital transformation initiatives at their organizations. In 2020, McKinsey found that the number of companies undergoing digital transformation was increasing. It is safe to say that with technology constantly evolving, this trend will continue. Foundational skills are often not transferable to artificial intelligence and automation, which increases their already immense value. Organizations, now more than ever, must invest in and reward foundational skills.

For the purposes of reviewing foundational skill measurement in the context of actual learning programs and tools, CLN analysts took a close look at simulations offered by Abilitie to examine real-world implications for learners and client L&D organizations. Abilitie's simulations offer professionals the opportunity to experience real-world scenarios in a safe environment in order to foster real-life skills. The company operates under the philosophy that excessive realism in simulated environments can be counter-productive, as it leads to unnecessary complexity that obscures learning outcomes.

ABILITIE OFFERS FIVE KEY SIMULATIONS:

MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

**BUSINESS CHALLENGE**

ENTERPRISE CHALLENGE

FINANCE CHALLENGE

EXECUTIVE CHALLENGE

These challenges allow for experiential learning, and they develop leadership and critical business skills such as people management, business acumen, leadership development and executive decision-making. Each simulation is led by an expert facilitator in the field. Abilitie also offers multi-week, cohort-based leadership development programs centered around these simulations.
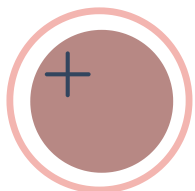
HOW ARE ABILITIE'S CLIENTS MEASURING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS?

Measuring targeted and specific skills through self-reporting and surveys is one method. At Nokia, reporting by 400 managers in 16 groups showed a measured financial benefit of €12 million after partnering with Abilitie. They also found that applied learning increased by 93%, reflective practice increased by 96% and peer co-coaching increased by 147%.

Many of Abilitie's clients have successfully measured the simulations' impact on the business through tracking promotions. At Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), 21.1% of participants in the Enterprise Challenge were promoted within one year of taking part in the program.

Julie Steele, Vice President of Talent Acquisition & Talent Management at Envista, also used career advancement data to evaluate the success of Abilitie's simulations:

> "We looked at how many talent moves we have made with the participants after the course ... How many of those people within a six-month period of time were promoted into a bigger role?
>
> **Julie Steele, Vice President of Talent Acquisition & Talent Management, Envista**

SUMMARY

This special report has outlined multiple best practices for effectively measuring and analyzing L&D as the data-driven practice grows and evolves in the next few years. All of these methodologies can be applied to measuring foundational skills, specifically. Being transparent with employees regarding the data being collected and studied, applying the scientific method and combining learning and performance data are all key. In fact, since foundational skills are less concrete, it is even more imperative to employ control and experimental groups and take all potential variables into account when measuring the success of a training program. It is important to put in place a system for mapping skills and skill levels, especially when it comes to less tangible qualities such as leadership and management acumen.

What should you look for in your learning technology and learning content in order to enable effective measurement?

- Courses that are designed to develop specific competencies, so you can measure participant growth in those areas
- Technology providers with the ability to implement courses with control and experiential groups in order to scientifically evaluate results
- Learning technology that facilitates foundational skill development, which is becoming increasingly important to measure
- Clear and open communication with participants regarding what data is being tracked

Implementing targeted learning is optimal when it comes to achieving these goals, and experiential learning is a great method by which to strengthen skills through practice. Experiential, simulation-based learning is ideal for foundational skill development, as it offers learners the opportunity to respond to novel situations in a way that mimics how they would behave in a real-world environment. Targeted and experiential learning courses, such as the options offered by Abilitie, lead to learner outcomes that are easy to measure.

Foundational skills are the future, and so are measurement and data. This is why it's time for leaders to reimagine L&D measurement to combine data and essentia skills to future-proof their organizations and create success in years to come.
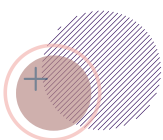
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan is passionate about writing and enjoys creating content about established and developing trends in the corporate world. In previous jobs, she wrote and edited marketing and thought leadership content. Megan loves learning and expanding her knowledge through travel.

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