



# The L&D **Audit**

How to Ensure Your Learning  
Organization is Ready for Change



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# Introduction

Change isn't just on the horizon. It's already here and has been massively accelerated by events such as the Covid pandemic. Things like skills obsolescence and digital transformation have been an ongoing concern for organizations worldwide for some time, but are now reaching critical levels of urgency for businesses who want to remain competitive.

But responding effectively to such fundamental shifts takes careful planning and a concerted effort to align the entire organization behind new strategies and goals.

In the midst of all this, L&D leaders find themselves in a position that presents challenge and opportunity in equal parts. Training programs and learning strategies will undoubtedly play a decisive role in how successfully your organization manages this ongoing change. L&D departments will have the opportunity to influence organizational performance like never before. With that opportunity comes the challenge of making sure your department is fully equipped to rise to the occasion.

That's where a top to bottom audit of your learning organization comes into play. Establishing the current state of your department across all dimensions ensures you're better able to respond to organizational demand, operate as efficiently as possible, and align with the needs and priorities of stakeholders.

## Getting Started with your L&D Audit

A full audit of your L&D department can be as high level or as granular as you need it to be. However, the more in-depth you can go, the more accurate and complete your current state analysis will be. This will lead to a much more robust decision making process when it comes to potential change implementation as a result of your audit.

But focusing on change, not just within the L&D department but in the context of the wider organization and market forces, means addressing some key areas during your audit, including:

- L&D Strategy
- Learning Audiences & Personas
- Stakeholder Relations
- Team Capacity & Resources
- Learning Operations
- Data & Analytics
- Digital Maturity



# L&D Strategy Audit

More than simply launching initiatives and jumpstarting new processes, a robust strategy must underpin all decisions. Without the big picture, short-term initiatives can fail to make an impact.

Starting your audit with your L&D strategy is the best way to ensure the rest of your audit is focused on organizational objectives and performance. Your strategic audit will help you analyze past performance to identify where your current strategy is falling short.

An L&D strategy should clearly outline:

- The mission of the learning organization
- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- Who do we do it for?
- What value do we bring?
- L&D departmental objectives
- Planned initiatives to meet the objectives
- KPIs to measure the success of those initiatives
- The timelines and milestones of each initiative

If you don't currently have a formalized L&D strategy, start with the outline above. To make sure your L&D strategy and objectives are realistic achievements rather than just words on a page, create each objective and initiative with **SMART goals** in mind. This means each objective and initiative should be specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and timebound.



## Specific



## Measurable



## Actionable



## Relevant



## Timebound



### Specific

Vague objectives won't get you very far. So, ensure your goals are written with specific parameters in mind. Think about:

- What you want to accomplish
- Why the goal is important
- Who will be involved
- Where it will happen
- Which resources will be needed

### Measurable

Do you have a specific end goal that will let you know when the goal has been achieved? If you don't, your initiatives will quickly lose direction. Think about:

- Practical outcomes
- Specific performance metrics
- How you will know when the goal has been achieved

### Actionable

Is a complete training program overhaul a realistic goal for you in 2021? If it's not, then don't set yourself up for failure. Be ambitious with your objectives but balance that ambition with a realistic perspective on what you, your team, and your organization can achieve in L&D within the next year. Think about:

- Will you be able to get all the resources you need?
- Are there any constraints that make achieving the objective practically impossible?

### Relevant

Maybe there's been talk about implementing mobile learning. But is that something your learners want or need? Will it help bring the organization closer to its overall aims and objectives? Think about:

- Whether the goal is worthwhile
- If the timing is right or not
- Does it still apply to any new circumstances or objectives within the organization?

### Timebound

Although you're creating objectives to be achieved within a relatively long time frame, each objective and initiative will have its own time requirements. You also can't do everything at once, so it's important to define milestones and deadlines for each initiative. That way, you can track progress throughout the year. Think about:

- Is this objective too big for one year?
- What can I realistically achieve?
- What can be done next week or in six months?



Evaluating your learning strategy is something that should be done both at the beginning and end of your overall audit. You will likely find that an analysis of different areas of your training department will have a significant impact on the goals and objectives of your L&D strategy and help you to refine it even further.



# Learning Audiences & Learner Personas

Learner personas enable your training team to keep the learner at the centre of all decisions around training, from analysis to design and delivery. But learner personas can change over time. So a regular audit and reassessment of your learner personas ensures you are staying current and relevant in terms of your learners' needs and expectations.

## What is a Learner Persona?

The concept of a persona to represent a target audience was first developed by product and marketing teams. They are used as a way to guide decisions when materials are designed and produced. Personas allow your team to ensure whatever they produce is created with an empathetic approach towards the end user.

The result of using personas are experiences and products that provide maximum value to the end user by taking their demographics, preferences, and expectations into account during the analysis and design phase. Learner personas are profiles of make believe people who represent the traits and preferences of different segments of your learning audiences. A learner persona might include:

- Name, age, seniority, and previous experience
- Learning preferences
- Common challenges
- Hard skills acquired
- Soft skills aptitude
- Career aspirations

When designing a learning experience for a specific group of learners within your organization, you and your team can use these personas to design training that maximizes engagement and provides true value to the learner.

## Why audit your learner personas?

Even if you already have learner personas, it's important to assess their relevance and accuracy regularly. The preferences and demographics of the workforce change over time. A learner persona created ten years ago may no longer apply.

For example, Millennials and Gen Z are rapidly moving into the workforce as older generations move out. The expectations, career aspirations, and learning preferences of these employees has been shown to be vastly different to previous generations. They're also generally more digitally fluent.

Other factors that may impact your learner personas are mergers and acquisitions, shifts in corporate culture, and external market forces.

Regularly auditing your learner personas ensures the learning experiences designed by your team resonate with learners, address their needs, and cater to their preferences for maximum value added.



# Auditing **Existing** Learner Personas



Regular audits and reassessments of your learner personas ensure you are staying current and relevant.

## 1. Assess **company wide** changes

Major shifts in the organization can have a significant impact on the demographics and preferences of your learners. For example, if your company has merged, you may have an entirely new group of employees and learners to take into account. Perhaps your business is expanding into an entirely new market, or leadership has changed and major cultural changes are underway.

The pandemic is a prime example of the type of change that could impact the validity of your existing learner personas. There have been budget freezes, cuts to headcount and an entirely new way of working for many people throughout the shift to remote work.

These types of changes should be taken into consideration at the beginning of your learner persona audit so you can align them with business needs as well as learner preferences.

## 2. Structure your **learner persona**

Before you go any further, structure a blank learner persona. This will let you know what type of information you need to collect to create robust and genuinely useful learner personas.

What gaps exist in your current learner personas? Are there any demographics or elements that you could collect that would enable your training team to develop more valuable learning experiences? Once you have the learner persona fully structured, you can begin gathering what you need.



### 3. Conduct a survey

Many organizations already conduct learner surveys regularly to assess demand and preferences. When conducting an employee survey related to training, ensure you include questions that can help you segment your learning audience and accurately fill in the blanks in your existing personas. Your survey should capture:

- General demographics
- Position and tenure with the company
- Role and responsibilities
- Attitude towards training
- Current time spent on training
- Existing skills profile
- Career goals
- Learning goals
- Learning delivery preferences
- Digital fluency
- Defining traits
- Current challenges in their role
- Training courses completed to date

Some information may be difficult to gather through surveys. In that instance, it can be beneficial to leverage HR and team performance data to round out your learner personas.

### 4. Assess past performance

Surveys can be useful, but they also have their limitations. People are prone to saying one thing in a survey but failing to follow through. This has been shown many times over when market research fails to accurately predict what customers actually want once a product or service is in front of them.

So, while survey data can be a primary source of information for your learner personas, it's also important to look at the hard and fast results of training.

If you've been gathering feedback from training sessions regularly, it's just a case of analyzing the performance of different types and topics of training. Similarly, eLearning platforms or your LMS can make it easy to analyze adoption and engagement rates with previous training.

By assessing the past performance of training against your survey results, you can build a more accurate picture of respondents true preferences and need for different types of training.

### 5. Identify trends

Once your data is gathered, you can begin to identify trends and segments within your overall learning audience.

Significant groups within your learning audience can then be segmented and a learner persona created (or an existing one amended) to reflect the demographics, preferences, and behaviours of that group.

### 6. Incorporate the changes

Now that the trends are identified, you can begin to incorporate them into your learner personas.

Learner personas should read as if the person is real, even though they are a fictional representation of a large group of people. Writing them this way provides your instructional designers and training team members with a person, rather than a bland list of demographics. Designing for a person rather than a statistic is what ensures an empathetic and learner-focused approach to learning design.





# Stakeholder Relations

When it comes to delivering value, your learners are only half the equation. Aligning with corporate strategy to produce performance-driving results for your organization takes close collaboration and consultation with critical business partners and stakeholders.

But, when working with internal customers, it's not all about taking direction and delivering on each and every request that passes through your inbox. L&D needs to move towards partnering with internal stakeholders to deliver training that is needed, not just training that is requested.

Auditing or assessing the way you currently work with stakeholders provides an opportunity to act as learning consultants rather than training producers, which means better training results for your team, stakeholders, and learners.

This may be a more fluid process than the rest of your audit. It's difficult to quantify stakeholder relations and it's even more difficult to change perceptions and relationships that are well established.



**“Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.”**

Henry Ford

## **To assess how productive your stakeholder collaboration currently is, consider the following:**

- Does your training team work more closely or efficiently with some departments more than others? Why is that?
- How long does it take to move from initial training request to project kick off and project completion?
- Do misunderstandings about deliverables and timeframes frequently crop up? Is scope creep an ongoing challenge for your training team?

## **Once you have a better understanding of how your training team works with stakeholders, there are several steps you can take next, including:**

- Establishing a Learning Advisory Committee to better engage with key stakeholders and business units
- Find ways to get stakeholder more involved with the training development process
- Identify gaps in training project management processes that are causing misconceptions and unrealistic expectations



# Assessing L&D Team Capacity & Resources

In a recent update to an ongoing ATD study on the time it takes to create training, the researchers added some survey questions to the study. They asked respondents to name the top barriers to faster production of training.

An overwhelming 67% of respondents named limited resources (including time, budget, or L&D team headcount) as the biggest barrier to producing training faster.

It makes sense. No matter how advanced your learning tech stack or how hard you work, team capacity is a finite resource. There are only so many hours in a day and there are only so many people on your training team.

An L&D audit is the perfect time to quantify your team's capacity as precisely as possible so you're better placed to make strategic decisions and to assign projects and tasks for maximum efficiency.

## What is Capacity?

When it comes to learning and development, capacity refers to your team's ability to meet their proposed workload. Capacity can be broken down into different metrics depending on which is most applicable to the way your team works.

For example, you could calculate capacity in relation to the number of projects that can be completed in a specific time period. Or you could calculate it based on hours of proposed work and hours of availability.

More specific parameters (such as hours) will give you a more accurate estimate of your team's true capacity, especially as it allows you to take more variables into account. Higher level parameters such as number of projects can be easier to calculate based on past performance.



**“When we fail to grasp the systemic source of problems, we are left to ‘push on’ symptoms rather than eliminate underlying causes.”**

Peter Senge



# Calculating Your Team's Capacity



## Why calculate team capacity?

Calculating the capacity of your L&D team benefits your entire learning organization.



### Capacity Vs. Demand

When you have concrete data backing you up, it becomes much easier to rationalize your response to training requests and the prioritization of specific projects over others. When a request lands in the team inbox, you'll know immediately whether this is something your team is capable of taking on immediately, or if it will have to wait.



### Committing to Training Projects & Scheduling Deadlines

When the time comes to schedule a project, your team capacity calculations will enable you to make an informed decision on when the project can be scheduled to begin and end. You'll be able to assess the demand each project will place on your resources and decide which can run concurrently and which should be scheduled for a later date.



### Strategic Decision Making

Knowing your team's true capacity enables managers to make strategic decisions about budgets, hiring extra resources, or onboarding new technology to lighten the load. Strategic decision making is better decision making, and it ensures you're able to make the most of your resources.



## How to calculate team capacity

Calculating your team's capacity can get complicated, but it's an exercise well worth completing and it can be done to varying degrees of complexity. The core elements are:



### Team availability (by hours)

When calculating the amount of hours of availability of your team, you can include full time, part time, contract, and freelance staff. You can also take annual leave and time off into account to get a full and accurate picture of how many hours your team can dedicate to their workload in a given time period.



### The availability of specific skill sets at the team level

Your training team is likely to consist of a diverse set of experience and skills. Different projects will require different skill sets. As part of your capacity assessment, you can calculate the availability of specific skills within your department by hours. This can include design expertise, skills with particular sets of technology such as authoring tools, etc.



### Experience and speed

Depending on the experience level of an individual team member, some will work much faster at different tasks than others. Incorporating the speed and proficiency of individual team members in relation to different tasks provides a more accurate picture of your team's capacity for fulfilling project requirements.

## Assessing Your Team's Capacity

Many L&D teams struggle to keep up with the demand for training. Prioritizing projects and managing stakeholder expectations is a common challenge. So it probably won't come as a surprise if your calculations show that your training team is stretched to capacity or working well over it to keep up with demand. Once you've got some hard and fast capacity numbers to work with, you can leverage that data to audit for operational efficiency and strategic decision making, such as:

- Budget increases or reallocation
- Increasing headcount in specific areas or skills
- Onboarding new technology to free up team capacity



# Learning Operations Audits

Prior to the events of 2020, the outlook for L&D was looking extremely promising. Budgets were going up, L&D teams felt they were getting a seat at the table, and the reputation of learning programs was starting to move from cost-center to performance driver.

But few could have predicted just how rapidly things could shift in the space of a few months. While the global pandemic provided a unique opportunity for L&D to cement their position as an essential value-add to the organization, many also reported budget freezes and cuts to headcount.

In the short term, that means even the most mature L&D teams will have to do more with less. In the long term, preparation for a faster pace of business and better alignment with organizational needs is a must if L&D are to continue proving their worth to the business.

Both of these objectives require training teams to have a firm grasp on operational efficiency. Auditing the efficiency and effectiveness of internal L&D operations enables you to increase the quantity and quality of your output by working with what you have.

## L&D Operational Efficiency Components

When it comes to operational efficiency, there are three core areas that must be audited for an accurate current state analysis:

- Your L&D strategy
- All processes related to training development
- Your existing learning technology stack

But what exactly are you auditing for? Within the three areas, you're trying to get an accurate reading on your operations across three main criteria:

### 1. Effectiveness

Part of your audit will include analyzing whether your operations are having the impact they should. What are your objectives and goals? Are you currently meeting them? What metrics are you using to track the performance of your team's operations and the output itself?

### 2. Efficiency

The speed and efficiency of your operations should be closely analyzed too. The idea is to maximize output and minimize waste. For example, what elements of your learning stack are actually slowing you down rather than speeding you up? Are you extracting all the value possible from each tool? What are the bottlenecks in your processes that are unnecessarily tying up resources?

### 3. Alignment

Finally, are your operations built for alignment? That encompasses alignment with the organization, stakeholders, subject matter experts, learners, and the different components of your training team.



# How to Conduct an Operational Audit of L&D

Think about your current processes and workflows. Were they carefully thought out? Or have they developed in an ad-hoc manner over time?

Most business processes develop over a long period of time. Changes and improvements often come from individuals seeking to do their own jobs more efficiently. They want more time back during the day because they are overloaded or because they spot room for improvement.

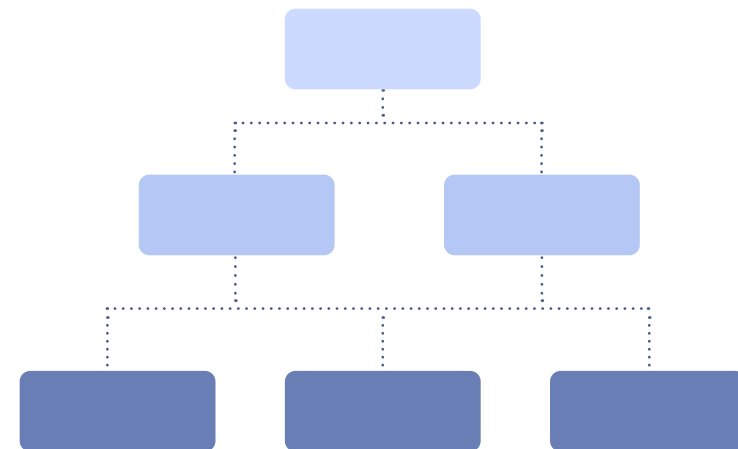
Adaptations to processes mostly occur as a response to change. The events of 2020 are a perfect example of this. Working from home has been on the cards for years, but few businesses ever considered it until they had to, despite the fact that statistics show most employees are actually more productive in a work-from-home environment.

But when processes are adapted quickly as a response to necessity, they're often not as efficient as they could be. Auditing the efficiency of your current processes allows you to take a proactive approach to working the best way your team possibly can.

During a process audit, it's important to get as many employees on the training team involved as possible. Since they are the ones actually working through these processes on a day-to-day basis, they are best placed to provide feedback on whether a proposed change is possible or optimal.

## An audit of your process should:

- Enable you to pinpoint waste of resources (including time)
- Identify cost saving opportunities
- Identify opportunities to maximize your team's output





**During your audit process, some important questions or areas of concern include:**

- Why do we do it this way?
- Did we always do it this way? If not, why were changes made?
- Who does this process impact? What is their feedback?
- Is there documentation outlining the correct steps to take?
- Does the team always follow the correct procedure? If not, are some steps unnecessary?
- How much time does this process generally take from beginning to end?
- Can any of this be automated?
- Are any steps being duplicated across different team members or departments?

**Remember to keep your audit's scope wide.**

It's important to step outside learning design and widen the scope of the processes you are auditing. Many processes that slow down training teams occur long before and after a course is designed and deployed. For example, consider the following processes:

- Training intake
- Collaboration with business partners, stakeholders, and SMEs
- Knowledge capture
- Project planning and management
- Resource allocation
- Storage, cataloguing, and updating of learning content

Once you have identified a full list of processes that directly impact your training team, you'll quickly begin to see areas for improvement including automation and other time saving techniques.



**“The most dangerous kind of waste is the waste we don’t recognize.”**

Shigeo Shingo



# How to Conduct an Operational Audit of L&D

Learning and development teams spend many hours developing training courses for employees. But without a sufficient feedback loop, questions are raised: is this training effective? Do employees find it useful? Are we properly supporting organizational goals and improving performance? Without properly set up training analytics, it can be anyone's guess as to whether the carefully curated training program is effective.

Not only that, but there are lots of metrics not directly related to learning experiences or learner performance that can tell you everything you need to know about how effectively and efficiently your training team is operating.

## 1. Training Intake

Gathering and interpreting training intake data helps L&D to close skills gaps, understand the needs and demand for training in the organization, and better analyze existing resources. By understanding some of the data you can gather right from the training request phase, you can make better informed decisions about how to prioritize requests and understand the training needs amongst employees and management.

Some examples of training intake metrics to start measuring include the:

- Volume of training requests your L&D department receives
- Acceptance/rejection rate of training requests
- Department and topic of each request

Consequently, trends will emerge that can help you align new course design to training demand and organizational performance.

The first step to tracking training intake metrics is creating standardized training request forms. Then, you can consistently collect data on the metrics you want to track.

## 2. Operational metrics

Why bother collecting and analyzing data on your training projects? One of the key benefits is resource allocation. By understanding how long it takes for your team to complete specific tasks and types of projects, your future planning and resource allocation becomes more streamlined and effective.

Some training project metrics to aggregate and analyze include:

- Average time it takes to complete projects
- Time spent on individual project phases such as intake, development, testing, etc.
- Average project costs and budget required

The key is to find project management tools that will easily allow you to extract and analyze these kinds of metrics.





### 3. Learning Performance Metrics

All this is not to say that learning metrics are unimportant. They are, and will always be, a critical indicator as to the impact and success of your training program. But learning performance metrics can go well beyond learner engagement rates. Auditing the learning metrics you track involves:

- Assessing the metrics you currently track: Are they vanity metrics? Or do they really tell you something important about the success of your training program?
- Aligning your analytics with the objectives outlined in your learning strategy: Do you have KPIs in place to track your progress towards strategic objectives?
- Leveraging organizational performance data: What can business performance tell you about the success of your learning initiatives? Can you find better ways to tie new training programs to bottom line business outcomes?

While you can track and measure KPIs in a spreadsheet, it's time consuming work to maintain and requires a higher level of expertise to extract analytical insight from raw data.

As you'll see in the next section, technology has a critical role to play in how you track and analyze metrics across your learning experiences and operations.





# Benchmarking Your Digital Maturity

There are many definitions of digital maturity. The most widely accepted and condensed is the notion that digital maturity indicates your team's ability to create and deliver value through digital means.

Digital transformation is sometimes used interchangeably with the term digital maturity. But a more accurate interpretation would be that digital transformation is the process through which digital maturity is achieved.

It's also worth noting that digital maturity is not a fixed state that you can eventually achieve and be done with. Many technologies that were revolutionary 10 years ago are already obsolete. As technology continues to evolve, so will the definition of digital maturity.

Traditionally in L&D, the creation of value has been viewed through the lens of digital learning experiences. Most recently, it has included the use of cutting edge technologies such as Virtual Reality and AI in the design and delivery of learning materials.

## Defining Value

But “value” encompasses a huge range of possibilities within L&D. Value can be delivered through the digital transformation of many processes and outputs, including:

- Training intake
- Team collaboration
- Project management
- Capacity planning
- Resource management
- Learning design
- Learning delivery
- Processes and workflows
- Documentation
- Insights and analytics

### The value delivered through the digitization of these processes includes:

- Faster implementation of more impactful training initiatives
- Better understanding and collaboration between team members and stakeholders
- Faster knowledge capture from SMEs
- More efficient use of resources including time and budget
- Increased team capacity by eliminating manual tasks

Using these criteria and parameters can help you to audit and assess the current digital maturity of your L&D team and point you towards areas of improvement.



# Evaluating Your Existing Tech Stack

Digital maturity is not possible without the right technology at your side. For example, perhaps you use email to send documents back and forth between team members. Is this digital? Technically, yes. But is it the most mature type of technology to leverage for things like collaboration and version control? Absolutely not.

That being said, digital maturity does not necessarily mean using the latest or most cutting edge technology. But it is about finding the most efficient and effective way to work via digital channels. So, when you're evaluating your current tech stack, benchmarking your digital maturity can encompass questions such as:

- Are we using multiple tools when one will suffice?
- Do our different technologies speak to each other and integrate well?
- What processes are still manual that could easily be digitized?
- Is the training team leveraging each piece of technology to its full potential?
- Are the tools we're using purpose built for our needs?

Lastly, it's time to combine your operational audit and your technology audit. For example, maybe you have a clumsy process that takes place across email, multiple documents, spreadsheets and storage locations.

Conducting some research as a result of your learning tech audit may show you that there is a piece of technology out there that can consolidate many processes into one place. If that's the case, the time and cost savings of replacing a disparate set of tools could make some room in your budget for a new, more efficient addition.



**67% of L&D and talent professionals say limited resources (including time, budget, or L&D team headcount) as the biggest barrier to producing training faster.**

Study by ATD



## Conclusion

A full L&D audit takes time to plan and structure. It is a time consuming task and one that should be given the focus and attention it requires. Performing an audit in this way ensures you can actually take some actionable insights from it so you can improve your operations and outcomes.

Once your audit is completed, you'll be able to make more informed strategic decisions about how your team operates, the type of learning initiatives you should focus on, how to track your success, and which learning technology you should adopt to help you get there.

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