

Home > Analyst Blogs > Josh Bersin's Blog
The Business Of Talent

The New Best-Practices of a High-Impact Learning Organization

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We just completed the brand new version of our enduring research, [The High-Impact Learning Organization \(HILO\)](#). This research, which involves several years of effort, uncovered some groundbreaking new findings and rich new set of tools and assessments to help organizations improve.

In this blog post I'll highlight our new HILO Maturity Model, our new Enterprise Learning Framework, and give you a few of the key findings. Bersin member organizations can access all the research and tools through our Bersin *Insights*® platform.

About the Research

As in prior years, in this research we looked at 18 different elements of corporate L&D (Leadership, organization structure, roles, use of technology, measurement techniques, content management skills, and more) among around 300 organizations and correlated the impact of these various practices on a variety of business outcomes.

Members and those who purchase the overview study can look at the specific outcomes we study. Our WhatWorks® methodology looks at impact in three ways:

- Efficiency (how well so you use the resources you have)
- Effectiveness (what impact is L&D having on the organization),
- Alignment (how well does your organization shift priorities to rapidly focus on top priorities of the business at a given time).

It turns out that *alignment*, a measure which most companies don't think about enough, is one of the biggest challenges in L&D. This research shows that only 14% of the organizations feel "fully aligned" with their top business executives, a surprisingly low number (these are large organization).

As you know, training is a complex operation and requires many critical skills and capabilities. With most companies now globalizing their programs, the research shows that it can be very difficult to stay well-aligned with your business's needs around the world.

Some Key Findings

First, our research shows very clearly that companies with High-Impact Learning Organizations outperform their peers.

These organizations delivered *profit growth three-times greater* than their competitors over the last four years. Why is this? Simply put - if you can keep your employees current and skilled, you can evolve and perform better than your competitors.



About This Analyst



Josh Bersin writes on the ever-changing landscape of business-driven learning, HR and talent management. His favorite topics include strategic talent management, creating high-impact learning organizations, and how organizations drive business change and competitive advantage through talent strategy and technology.

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Calendar

< September 2012 >						
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Second, our research shows a distinct shift away from a pure focus on "training programs" to a focus on "organizational capability development."

Over the last ten years the L&D industry has absorbed tremendous amounts of new technology (e-learning, video, simulations, mobile learning, SME-authored content, rapid development tools), resulting in a training department which now awash in content. The key to success is no longer simply developing great content, but rather arranging it and delivering it with a focus on "continuous capability development." Call us for support if you'd like to better understand this whole topic.

Third, our research shows that the L&D industry needs reskilling itself.

In the last ten years training professionals have had to learn many new things: e-learning technology, search, information architecture, UI, social learning, collaboration tools, and much more. And under all this is a continuous focus on adult learning styles, instructional design, assessment, and measurement. We can now add globalization, talent management, and learning culture to the list. In total: high-impact L&D professionals need to continuously train themselves.

(All the research, case studies, and tools from this research are available to our [Research Members](#), and you can also purchase the core findings and details on the maturity model in our [research store](#).)

The New Bersin & Associates HILO Maturity Model

Now let me get to the core of this research. Through our data collection and interviews we identified four validated "levels" of maturity for the L&D function. Throughout a company this type of evolution takes place in sales training, customer service training, leadership development, and across the company as a whole.

The model has four levels, shown below, and I will briefly introduce them in this article. Research members can get the detailed descriptions and assessment tools from the Bersin *Insights*® platform.

Bersin & Associates High-Impact Learning Organization Maturity Model®



Fig 1: Bersin & Associates HILO Maturity Model

Level 1 - Incidental Training

Here is where all teams start. A new employee comes to work and someone "trains them" on how to do their job.

This type of training is going on all day and is often among the most valuable training an employee gets. This is informal learning, unstructured, and often developed by workgroups or their teams to fill a gap unfilled by L&D.

Most sales and customer service teams deliver lots of "incidental training" every day - and we see this effort as a vital part of what a manager does. But over time of course "incidental training" is inconsistent, expensive, and unproductive. So as companies grow they realize that they need some professional help creating a more scalable solution.

- Global Trends and Benchmarks: Karen O'Leonard
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Archive

2012	2011
September (3)	December (4)
August (6)	November (4)
July (7)	October (4)
June (3)	September (4)
May (7)	August (4)
April (4)	July (6)
March (6)	June (5)
February (7)	May (4)
January (7)	April (5)
	March (7)
	February (1)
	January (6)

Level 2 - Training & Development Excellence

At level 2, where most companies are or are trying to become, you develop a "professional training function."

This is a small (or large) team of L&D professionals who build a set of programs, infrastructure, and tools which let you deliver formal training. Within level 2 organizations go through many stages - starting with formal training (e-learning and instructor-led), and then evolving to a continuous model which includes on-demand learning, coaching, performance support, and embedded learning tools.

They standardize their instructional design, implement standard technologies, and develop standard graphics, tools, simulations, and assessments. Google, for example, is in the middle of evolving its global L&D at stage 2, by developing a global instructional design team.

Most companies spend many years evolving their level 2 strategies, and this level of maturity results in a "corporate university" or a "sales training department" and many other group names. And within a large organization, there can be many such groups (Toyota's US dealer training is a high-impact Stage 2 organization, for example).

Level 3 - Talent and Performance Improvement

At level 3 companies significantly change their focus toward "talent-driven learning."

At this point the organization realizes that any learning activity should be aligned and organized by role, and companies integrate training programs into development planning and career development models. They map and design their learning around career progression and career transitions within the organization.

At Cisco, for example, the sales training group has a highly refined career model which trains sales people throughout their career as product, account, or team leaders. While this is not a talent-management program, it is a "talent-driven learning" strategy.

If you, as an L&D professional, have not studied talent management then you should. Today nearly 1/3 of all L&D teams are embedded in a talent management function we expect this trend to continue.

Even in an operational environment (ie. call centers) there is huge value in talent management. Employees in these positions want to know how they progress to new roles and what development is available to help them improve in technical, professional, or managerial skills. Our modern career development pyramid (member research) explains in detail how to do this.

Level 4 - Organizational Capability Development

At level 4 the L&D function looks at organizational capabilities as a whole. This is not just a new set of words, it's a different focus. Here is where you spend time understanding the detailed daily life of workers, all their various information and job-related needs, and work as a performance consultant to help them improve performance through many types of learning.

Our *Enterprise Learning Framework* (part of the HILO research) walks through this in detail. HILO organizations have strong performance consulting roles and they spend a lot of time understanding precise capability needs and deliver many forms of training to assist.

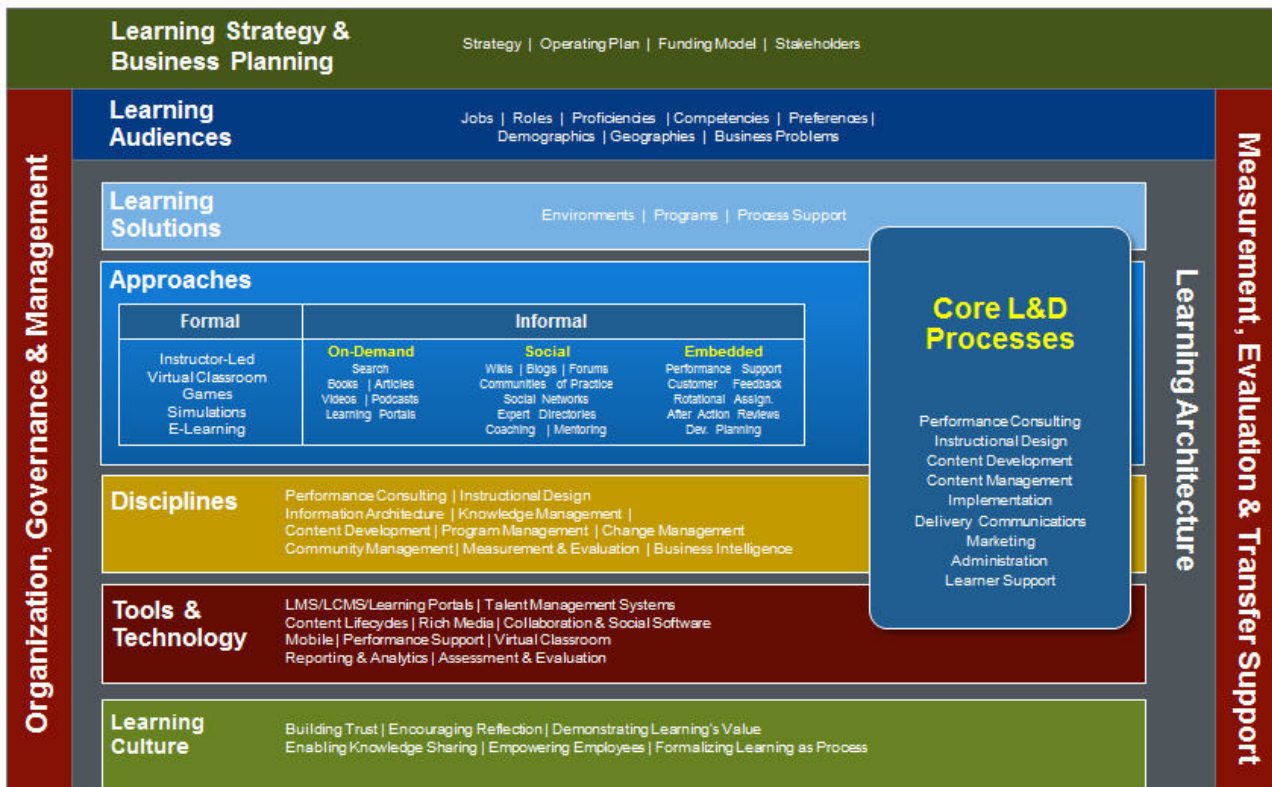


Fig 2: Bersin & Associates Enterprise Learning Framework®

Bottom Line:

All our research demonstrates that workforce capabilities are now a top issue in business. Companies who figure out how to implement a high-impact learning organization dramatically outperform their peers. Join our [membership program](#) and learn how you can drive learning to the next level in your organization.

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