Why Are Adaptive Learning Organizations Better Placed to Succeed in the Future? Insights from Research on Adaptive Learning Organization by NIIT and John Bersin Academy

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Abstract Three decades of *Chinese educational reforms* have created a workforce oriented towards an industrial economy. Now the challenge is to transform *China's talent-development model* to develop the skills needed in an innovative, digitized, postindustrial economy. NIIT has embraced the idea of "Running Training Like a Business", which means companies have to be agile and elastic. *Learning and Development (L&D)* has become more complex and increased pressure on organizations, while *Adaptive Learning Organizations (ALOs)* have three characteristics of adaptivity that enable a proactive and fluid learning ecosystem. This gives them an advantage.

Keywords Chinese educational reforms · China's talent-development model · Running training like a business · Learning and Development (L&D) · Adaptive Learning Organizations (AOLs)

The economic shock of the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated several pre-existing trends while also giving rise to entirely new ones. In the face of such rapid change, executives are piecing together the future landscape of value and the new rules of competitive advantage for their organizations. New value shifts are being driven by shifting customer needs and behaviors on the demand side, increased value chain uncertainty on the supply side, and a reversal of many of the trends that have defined pre-pandemic globalization.

Competitive positions are more vulnerable during such shifts, spelling both promise and perils for executives. Referred to as "the new normal" or "the big reset" the emerging landscape will be characterized by the emergence of new value pools and erosion or existing ones, among individuals, corporates, and nations.

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McKinsey's recent report published in January 2021 titled "*Reskilling China*" provides valuable insights both on challenges and opportunities that exist in transforming the world's largest workforce into lifelong learners. Three decades of Chinese educational reforms have created a workforce oriented towards an industrial economy. Now the challenge is to transform China's talent-development model to develop the skills needed in an innovative, digitized, postindustrial economy. Key findings include the following:

1. **A talent revolution in China can enable continuous improvement in living standards for all.** For China to achieve 70% of the average per capita GDP of high-income economies by 2050, a long-term goal as interpreted by Chinese think tanks, necessary per capita GDP growth of 4.7% and wage growth of 4.9% is required. This requires a skills revolution in China's workforce.
2. **Up to one-third of global occupational and skills transitions may occur in China.** By 2030, up to 220 million workers, or 30% of the workforce, may need to transition between occupations due to automation. That's about 36% of all global transitions as per MGI's future of work model. China needs to support the adaptation of migrant workers, who have listed resources and access to training and, often, low skills, given that 22–40% of their work is susceptible to automation.
3. **These transitions will require transforming China's education and skills development system. First**, learning will need to be extended beyond schools to cover China's adults; this requires tripling the scope of skills development. **Second**, content needs to evolve from basic to a broad range of skills. The high cognitive, social and emotional, and technical skills that will be in demand could account for an average of 40 days per worker by 2030. **Third**, education and skills development should be available to all throughout their lives to support all workers who need to become lifelong learners.

The research recommends pilot projects based on four levers to kick-start the transformation. They include:

1. **Adoption of digital technologies**. China's economy is already significantly digitized, with increasing investments in education technologies. More than 900 million internet users can benefit from digital technologies and enjoy enhanced quality through hybrid online-offline learning.
2. **Collaborative ecosystem**. Expanded use of public–private partnerships, like NIIT's partnerships with universities and industry in China to design joint programs and drive innovation and research on digital technologies, can help plug the gap between skills developed and what the market needs. Such partnerships help address talent shortages in key sectors identified by the government.
3. **Enhanced vocational tracks**. China can make vocational tracks attractive to students by expanding flexible pathways such as a "3 + 4" secondary-undergraduate model that enables them to go directly to application-oriented universities. NIIT partners with multiple universities in China for jointly operating IT colleges where we embed our global curricula, faculty, and educational

methodologies across a four-year bachelor degree program, to produce day one job-ready IT professionals when students graduate. This also improves the quality of educational resources and teaching staff for universities and colleges.

4. **Mindsets and incentives**. Individuals can share their lifelong journey by using information platforms and acquiring required skills through micro-credential programs. Employers can enhance competitiveness by strengthening their provisions of training. The government can provide incentives to further investments in human capital.

The report rightly advocates an integrated delivery unit approach between government, employers, educators, and social institutions to drive implementation. Deeper participation by private-sector players as talent development and investments in training and skills development is greatly needed.

For many years, we, at NIIT, have embraced and implemented the idea of "**Running Training Like a Business**", first detailed by Edward Trolley in a book of the same title which became a seminal piece of work in our industry. To run training like a business, companies have to be agile and elastic. Organizations that are able to respond nimbly to sudden disruptions display what we call the **4Cs of Agility—Capabilities, Capacity, Customer-centricity, and Cost-control**.

Learning and Development (L&D) is becoming ever more complex, and the need for specialized capability sets required to take advantage of the latest technologies and methodologies is exploding and putting an enormous amount of pressure on L&D organizations to keep up with various challenges.

In a world where profound changes are occurring rapidly, a deep understanding of customer needs and commitment to delivering a world-class customer experience seamlessly is vital. Disruptions cause surges in demand, and the reality to flex organizational capacity up and down in response to rapid changes in demand becomes critical.

Massive learning organizations often carry huge, fixed costs that go back as allocations to businesses struggling to manage volatility. It's never been more important to not just reduce costs but also move fixed costs to variable and implement "**pay-for-what-you-use**".

In recent times, we started to hear forward-looking learning and business leaders talk about a learning function that was more proactive, which could use data to predict the learning needs of a business or team, much before the business saw it as a capability requirement. Many such conversations shaped the notion of a learning organization that is highly adaptive.

NIIT got excited about this idea and decided to research this further.

We commissioned this research in early 2020 with the US-based Josh Bersin Academy, a little before the pandemic, which totally changed the magnitude of adaptivity required for any business to survive in this very fluid environment. Earlier in the year, when we started discussions with learning leaders, we thought we were getting best practices that would be more widely implemented in the future. But as we continued our discussions through the year, we found numerous examples of best practices that learning organizations had already successfully implemented to future proof themselves and to continue to deliver value to their business stakeholders. **Becoming adaptive represents a transformative stage in L&D**.

Our initial research on Adaptive Learning Organizations (ALOs) indicates that those companies outperform other organizations in both business and talent outcomes. We also found that ALOs share a common set of learning practices. They are far ahead of their peers in digital design and delivery strategies, learning in the flow of work, highly targeted programs, learner experience, collaboration, personalization, and understanding the future of work. These firms have the capability to sense market changes and fix learning structures, operating models, planning, and resources to serve the learning needs of the business quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

The external world will continually change and disrupt businesses and employee capabilities that are required to perform in the new environment. The current pandemic is obvious in its disruptiveness and impact on learning, however, change is always occurring, whether its economic recession, technology upheaval, or climate change, the ability to adapt is now a key requirement for businesses and the learning function.

Resiliency has become a key human skill across HR departments as businesses and employees are forced to adapt to new environments.

1   What is the Adaptive Learning Organization Model?

ALOs have three characteristics of adaptivity, which enable a proactive and fluid learning ecosystem. They SENSE, DECIDE, and EVOLVE better than their peer organizations.

- SENSE—the ability to harvest, measure, analyze, and draw actionable insights from multiple information and data sources to create forward-looking internal and external views.
- DECIDE—the ability to make accurate short-term and transformational decisions based on known information, collaboration, and built-in pivot points that allow for quick and efficient course correction.
- EVOLVE—the ability to implement changes and transform both for the immediate and sustainable future.

"Sensing" requires a whole new way of thinking and tools and practices that are looking forward at the beginning and not backward as we have traditionally thought in measuring learning.

The ability to sense allows L&D to forecast future needs more quantitatively and in a way that makes it easier to build a business case and align stakeholders.

For example, analyzing Salesforce activities and output provides real-time performance data on strengths and challenges client-facing staff have. A "Sensing" model where L&D is harnessing this Salesforce data would allow L&D to start at the actual performance need and build capability based on real talent and business data. This real-time data can also be used for workforce planning and forecasting longer term talent needs.

The depth of data and the ability to continually assess, learn, and act changes the game for how learning departments will operate and make investment decisions. Real-time data flows are now available from the LMS, LXP, LRS, HRMS, financial, sales, and operation platforms, to name a few, to build a picture of how learning can, and does, create value for the business and enhance the performance of learners. This type of data collection and analysis is seamless, unobtrusive to the business, and can be in real time. The adoption of data and analytics, AI, and machine learning are proving to be key components in ALOs. It allows the learning organization to make faster, better, and more effective decisions.

The second characteristic of an Adaptive Learning Organization is its ability to make highly relevant decisions quickly and plan, accordingly, knowing that the initial plans will change over time.

Having a continual flow of meaningful and insightful data at hand allows the learning organization to make proactive decisions and escape being reactive.

In other words, when things happen, it is prepared to make quick sense of the changing world and leverage the resources already in place (capabilities, processes, skillsets, technologies, budgets, etc.) to adapt to the new conditions.

ALOs were noticeably more prepared to adjust to the drastic changes required for learning during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were better able to analyze data and make realistic, viable, and difficult decisions faster. These organizations have been continuously learning and adapting and have the infrastructure and communication channels to adjust more easily. The organizations also relied heavily on their vendor/partners to bring thought leadership, augment capability, and efficiently pivot learning solutions to meet learners in their new working environments.

In contrast to these ALOs, many learning teams within the USA were simply caught off guard, even while they watched their Asian and European offices closing under the onslaught of COVID-19. They were slow to make decisions needed to implement new formats of learning and struggled to respond as they scrambled to

put forth band-aid remote learning solutions. The next characteristic of ALOs is their ability to evolve and sustainably transform their existing ecosystems.

Learning organizations that are adaptive are continually seeking innovation and testing new technologies and practices.
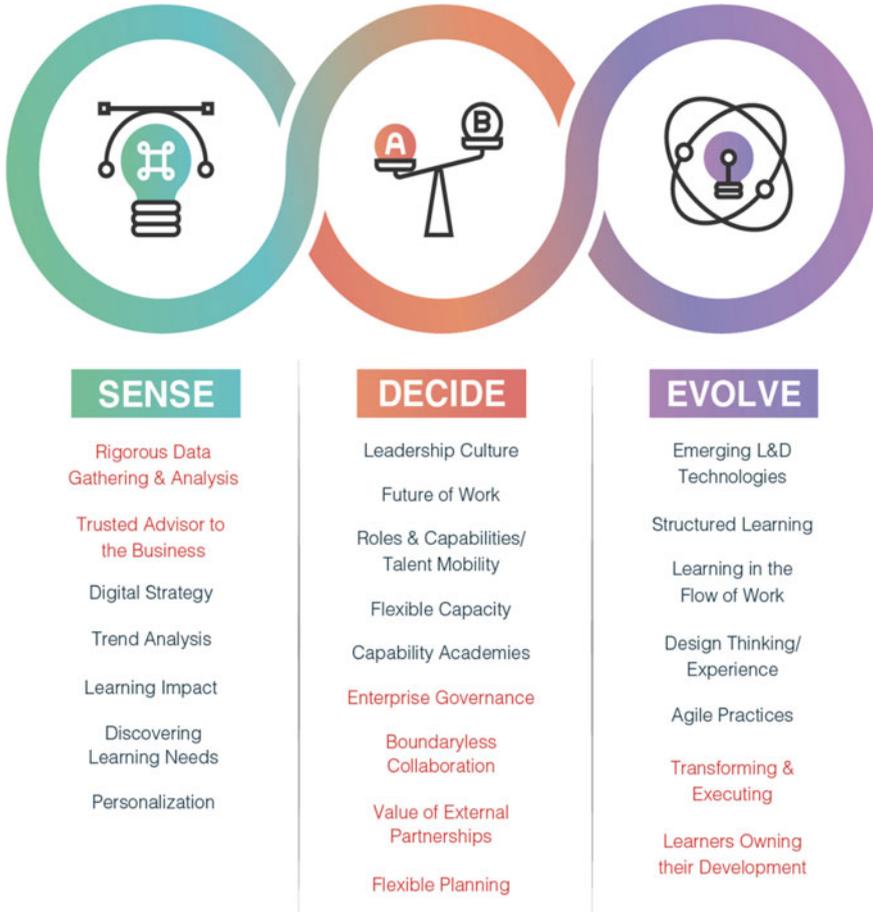
In other words, they are continually advancing their capabilities and practices. To do this well, ALOs build highly efficient, agile, and scalable operating models that anticipate and enable shifts in priorities and learning needs.

ALOs take a business-centric vs. L&D-centric view of the world, which allows them to better understand and support the business. Their service delivery model leverages design thinking, agile practices, and leading technologies to craft, test, deploy, and adjust solutions based on feedback data. Their operating models and processes are well thought out, documented, communicated, and integrated with the business. That doesn't mean that ALO systems are rigid, in practice, it is just the opposite. Flexibility, the ability to pivot, is built into the operating processes, resources, and structure to allow for dynamic and changing environments, giving L&D the ability to act with velocity.

For example, we found that ALOs have adapted to how employees work today. Most employees of large, global organizations work in highly connected and digitally enabled environments. The learning ecosystem of these organizations replicates the work environment. It is multi-modal, blended and anytime, everywhere. We rely heavily on digital tools regardless of our roles. Our social platforms, mobile devices, and online tools play a vital role in our daily jobs. Every production platform (Microsoft Teams, Salesforce, Google, Workday, SAP) is becoming more content-rich, so we must adapt our company-specific learning programs to embrace these new platforms. Having an agile service delivery model enables ALOs to anticipate and transition more easily to these new ways of delivering learning.

2 What Are the Benefits of Being an Adaptive Learning Organization?

As we started this research, we knew that adaptability, sensing, and flexibility were important. We put together a methodology that would specifically identify the practices that matter and then correlate these against various outcomes. There are 15 key practices to ALOs, and we looked at them all in detail.

SENSE	DECIDE	EVOLVE
Rigorous Data Gathering & Analysis	Leadership Culture	Emerging L&D Technologies
Trusted Advisor to the Business	Future of Work	Structured Learning
Digital Strategy	Roles & Capabilities/ Talent Mobility	Learning in the Flow of Work
Trend Analysis	Flexible Capacity	Design Thinking/ Experience
Learning Impact	Capability Academies	Agile Practices
Discovering Learning Needs	Enterprise Governance	Transforming & Executing
Personalization	Boundaryless Collaboration	Learners Owning their Development
	Value of External Partnerships	
	Flexible Planning	

2.1 The Adaptive Learning Organization Model—Dimensions, Practice, and ALO Insights

The accelerated changes of the twenty-first century in life, business, and L&D, such as big data, digital transformation, crowdsourcing, collaboration, agile, and design thinking, have nurtured a new model that has flexibility, transparency, and speed at its core. Organizations began building practices that fell into three dimensions, Sense, Decide, and Evolve.

2.2   The Adaptive Learning Organization Maturity Model

COHESIVE

Organization-wide/comp
rehensive awareness of
changing business and
learning needs, largely
internally focused,
mature communications,
stable governance,
emerging digital
platforms, slower to
adjust, some key
programs, traditional
transformation

ADAPTIVE

Highly aware of internal needs
and external trends and best
practices, deep communication
channels, digital ecosystem
maturity, proactive, focused
programs, agile transformation,
good balance of fixed and flexible
capacity, access to multiple
capabilities, collaborative
governance

16%

30%

21%

33%

REACTIVE

Limited awareness to changing
learning landscape, chaotic response
to change, inconsistent
communications, unorganized,
redundant systems and resources,
responsive vs. proactive
transformation, unclear resource
capacity

FRAGMENTED

Partial/siloed awareness of
changing business and learning
needs, reduced communication
channels, disparate technology
and transformation, limited
governance, duplicative key
programs, fixed and siloed
capacity with limited ability to pivot

We found that L&D organizations in the Reactive or Fragmented states typi-
cally were either highly decentralized, entrenched in outdated learning models, or
lacked a viable governance structure to communicate across the enterprise, to learn
from each other, and to adjust to broader and scalable changes in unison. They had
disjointed technology ecosystems, a high degree of duplicative resources, traditional
structures, and learning solutions, and despite being well aligned with the businesses
that they served, had a general lack of leadership culture to enable enterprise L&D
transformation when it was needed. They tended to be risk adverse or played a "wait
and see" game with the future. Often when enterprise transformation is attempted in
these types of organizations, it loses momentum and falls flat, as the disparate groups
continue their own practices and leadership cultures.

As L&D moves up the ALO maturity model, good things happen. L&D organizations within the Cohesive and Adaptive levels gain technology and analytical prowess, and an openness to explore, share, and communicate across L&D groups and with the business. They are increasingly seen as a "trusted advisor" to business leaders and HR, as they bring insights and solutions that map directly to changing talent and capability development requirements.

We found that more mature learning organizations have both the digital capability and the ability to personalize learning to the learner's needs through intelligent recommendations. This asset enables more of a consumer-grade experience, presenting highly relevant micro and macro learning opportunities at the point of need. Mature learning organizations also rely heavily on external partners to help guide, shape, and do the heavy lifting during transformational times, as well as provide scalable day-to-day solutions and forward-thinking market insights.

2.3 The Cost of Adaptability

Enhancing the adaptability quotient of your learning organization requires implementing a combination of learning transformations. Throughout discussions with ALOs, we found that building adaptability is a journey, and the time and investment required to enhance adaptability increase with the size of the business organization.

Cost of Adaptability Increases with Scale
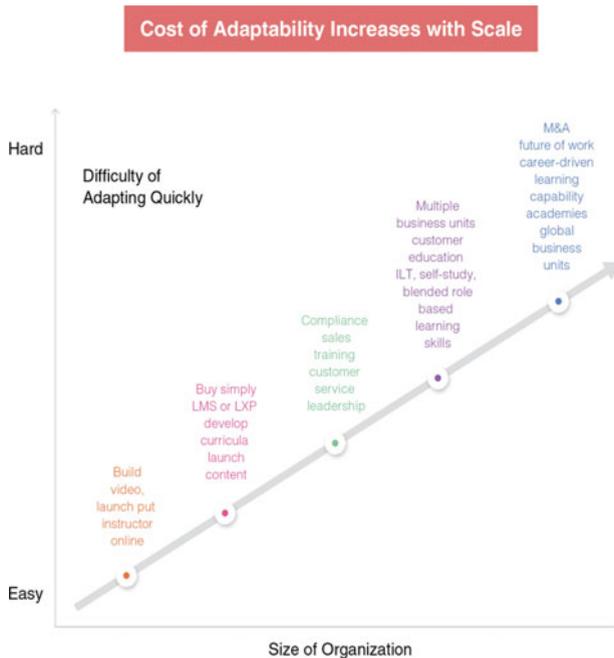
2.4   15 Characteristics of Adaptive Learning Organizations

SENSE	Trend Analysis	Learning Impact	Discovering Learning Needs	Digital Strategy	Personalization
DECIDE	Leadership Culture	Roles & Capabilties/Talent	Future of Work	Flexible Capacity	Capabilities Academy
EVOLVE	Emerging L&D Technology	Design Thinking	Learning in the Flow of Work	Agile Practices	Learning Journeys

2.4.1   SENSE

Trend Analysis

Today's world is forward-thinking, agile, and continually "listening" to what is happening to determine trends that could impact learning. Opportunities to engage with peers outside their organizations help broaden perspectives on trends, gather best practices, and test thinking and practices.

Adaptive Learning Organizations have a commitment to participate in external learning and business events to gather and share best practices. They believe that while learning is a strategic differentiator, there are common challenges and best practices that are relevant across industries and are best solved together by sharing experiences.

Learning Impact

Learning professionals have spent a considerable amount of time and resources implementing measurement models such as Kirkpatrick and Brinkerhoff to determine the impact and behavioral change outcomes from learning solutions. In many ways, these models perpetuate a L&D centric view of the world vs. a modern business or capability-driven approach. Also, implementing any of these models is a significant task for L&D.

We found that ALOs relied more on real-time measurement models. Starting with the question "What business challenges are we trying to solve?" They then identify specific metrics to target and utilize a wide range of data collection and analytics to determine impact, leveraging a digital analytics infrastructure already in place. For example, they measure level-1 metrics not through learner satisfaction surveys, but through content ratings, downloads, and follows, or other platform access data metrics that are already being captured and require no additional intervention.

ALOs are designed as open systems that transform to changing conditions in a fast, capable, and efficient manner. Therefore, the purpose of measurement is not to prove the effectiveness but gather insights for increased impact. Therefore, they

adopt a dynamic measurement model that integrates learning's impact on leading and lagging performance indicators.

Discovering Learning Needs

Traditional need analysis has remained constant and often includes annual executive-level stakeholder discussions, HRBP feedback, reviewing annual engagement survey data, competency assessments, collecting data from performance development conversations and manager requests. ALOs focus on defined skills and capabilities and leverage analytics, crowdsourcing, data sensing from collaboration and productivity tools, search term analysis, workforce planning insights, etc. to analyze in real time what the organization or key roles are searching on, the content they are viewing and topics they are discussing, and the emerging organizational capability requirements. This creates a living, dynamic taxonomy of skills and capabilities created by the learners and the market.

ALOs focus on analyzing current business, social, and learning data against a set of key skills and capabilities to address learning needs. It includes using unobtrusive data collection that pulls data from multiple internal and external sources.

Digital Strategy

Overall, digital adoption is still emerging in HR, learning, and talent management. For all the focus on digital transformation from a business and consumer perspective, there is still an opportunity in the HR space to drive deeper digital strategies and ecosystems. The learning and talent vendor space is still fragmented with more modern digital capabilities often available in smaller, non-enterprise solutions. While platforms such as Workplace, Microsoft, and Workday are expanding their capabilities, we found that ALOs are not waiting. They are actively pursuing their plans to leverage technology for enriching learning experiences and creating higher impact.

While some ALOs are leveraging what's available and integrating those into their learning ecosystem (e.g. solutions such as VR, AR, Chatbots, and conversation analysis), others are building band-aid extensions of their core platforms to enable additional functionality that can help them deliver more value.

Virtual Reality immerses employees into "real-life" situations that heighten their senses and makes them experience a close to real environment. VR learning provides a unique and memorable learning experience unlike a classroom or online program.

Personalization

Workplace learning is about developing a set of capabilities, whether those capabilities solve immediate work challenges, strengthen skills for a current role, future roles, or help enable an employee's career aspirations. In a traditional, hierarchical organization, roles are more clearly defined and role-based training solutions work well. However, in a modern, more network-driven organization, employees work in more fluid roles and in a more project-based structure. Each project might require a different capability mix. A broad sweep of role-based training is not as effective in a network-driven organization. A significantly higher level of personalization is required to make learning effective, contextual, relevant, and just in time for the learners.

ALOs recognize the need for ultra-personalization of learning. They also recognize that ultra-personalization is only possible by leveraging technology. They have set up or are in the process of setting up learning ecosystems that leverage learner persona and AI algorithms to create personalized learning journeys. They are using tools that allow for dynamic needs analysis and dynamic allocation of learning resources and scheduling of synchronous learning initiatives.

2.4.2   DECIDE

Leadership Culture

To adapt is to change, and change requires leadership. The four common themes that we found across ALOs are:

They have a strong learning culture driven by a focus on continuous learning at its core. The leaders of these organizations unquestionably understand the value of learning in meeting their business objectives. They openly and often share their commitment to learning.

The leaders have a connected vision that percolates from the CEO to the CHRO and the CLO. They also have a robust learning strategy that is led by the CLO, but very actively and openly supported by the CHRO and the CEO.

The learning leaders are strongly connected with the key business and cross-functional leaders within their organizations. Their strategic learning initiatives include strong participation from the business, HR, and other leaders.

Their leaders are cautious but certainly not risk adverse. They have ambitious goals for the value they want to create for their organizations and are willing to be the first to try out new tools and approaches to learning. They are not afraid of failing, but they also have robust mechanisms to control the impact of failure.

Executive leaders of ALOs empower and value learning and make room for it and invest in it as part of their business strategies. A strong leadership culture makes learning a priority, enabling, and encouraging learning to support both in-role and career development.

Roles and Capabilities | Talent Mobility

Heavily hierarchical organizations are slow to adjust their practices and resource structures, making them much less adaptable. It is far more of a command and control model that tends not to share resources widely across the organization or to pursue talent mobility as a strategic business driver. As more organizations adopt a flatter, flexible, and agile team-based operating model, the need to access a wide net of resources quickly becomes increasingly important. Likewise, as employees continually develop their skills, they need to have opportunities to utilize their capability and provide value back into the business. This need for internal talent mobility applies to the learning organization as well. We found that ALOs practice talent mobility for their learning teams as well and carry a mix of generic and specialized capabilities.

Future of Work

The Future of Work presents unique opportunities and challenges for each organization. Augmentation and automation will significantly impact the configuration of job roles and the human capabilities required to work alongside bots and robots. L&D organizations need to balance addressing the here and now learning needs while also building capabilities that will help their businesses succeed in the future. We found that ALOs are well out in front of their peers in having a Future of Work strategy that is aligned with the business. These ALOs have mechanisms to determine the impact of technologies on their job roles, determine the skills that will be needed in the future, have a mechanism to track current skills and capabilities, and learning ecosystems to enable mass re-skilling and up-skilling environments. We also found that ALOs have tighter integration with workforce planning vis-à-vis their peers and are actively collaborating with their workforce planning colleagues to make "build/buy/bend/bot" workforce decisions.

Flexible Capacity

Modern learning operating models utilize agile thinking and practices to adapt quickly to changing environments. ALOs build intentional pivot points into their short and long-term plans that mandate consideration of new or updated plan variables. ALOs also have fewer boundaries and collaborate across the organization around goals and outcomes. They employ an enterprise learning governance strategy that improves the decision-making process and gives a voice to all impacted stakeholders. ALOs leverage centers of expertise (e.g. capabilities), design and development centers, and vendor–partner relationships that significantly increase flexibility and scalability.

Learning organizations that have access to multi-disciplinary capabilities through partnerships have more elasticity in their resources, capacity, and capabilities. As the pandemic impacted the volume and type of learning activity, organizations that had flex pools of resources via learning partners found it much easier to alter the capability mix of their learning teams by, for example, replacing some of the facilitation activity with digital asset creation.

Capability Academies

Capability Academies are L&D vehicles that help build competitively differentiating strategic capabilities that an organization considers critical to its success. Most effective academies are holistic, business-driven, and sponsored by a senior business leader. In many cases, the academy is owned and managed by the business itself, with L&D playing an enabling role.

Our research shows that ALOs use the vehicle of Capability Academies to focus on skills that are strategically important for the organization. Their view of an academy is a mechanism to bring concerted effort toward building the targeted capability. For example, a large Canada-based retail organization shared how they were thinking of setting up a "pop-up" academy to build digital skills. They identified that digital skills would be a key focus area for them in the coming two years and setting it up as an Academy would enable them to align resources in a much more targeted way.

Characteristics of an Effective Capability Academy
Provide a place where learners and the business can:

- Build common knowledge, skills, and experiences for a strategic topic
- Learn through multiple ways including structured learning, experts, white-papers, online content, and from each other
- Have a strong sense of community and purpose
- Continually advance the topic and identify new capabilities that create strategic advantage
- Share best practices, experiences, and insights

By developing Capability Academies, organizations focus development growth in highly strategic areas, create a common language and direction, and build momentum within the organization.

2.4.3   EVOLVE

Emerging L&D Technology

L&D technology is traditionally centered on the LMS and a few development and delivery tools. This is changing with increased digitization. Cloud computing and interoperable systems are replacing the need to implement massive technology infrastructures that are in and of themselves rigid, highly integrated, customized, and slow to change. In the last decade, there has been an explosion of learning platforms, tools, and apps. Taking advantage of these new tools and platforms to optimize learning operations, create a connected learner experience, and strengthen alignment with business and other HR functions requires an appetite for considerable experimentation.

We found that ALOs continually monitor, test, pilot, and utilize new technology as a core capability. They have mechanisms to stay informed of the latest learning technologies, have an appetite to conduct proofs of concepts, along with a strong governance to maximize utilization of their existing learning investments instead of cluttering their technology landscape.

Design Thinking

Corporate learning was traditionally designed to deliver "essential" learning to employees. It was a "push" system where the corporate determined what it thought was needed by the learners and the L&D function delivered on the ask. One of the biggest changes, besides learning technologies, that has impacted L&D is changing employee expectations. Consumer experience has driven employees' expectations as learners. If banking can be anytime, anywhere, why not learning? Design thinking emerged from the product design world and has increasingly made its way into L&D as an approach that enables learner-centric thinking. This is further being driven by the need for highly personalized, relevant, and efficient learning delivered in ways that resonate with the learner persona. ALOs understand the value of learner centricity and have adopted design thinking practices as their core design approach.

Our research showed that ALOs have ditched the traditional ISD models and adopted agile, learner persona-based design thinking models that enable them to create rich learning experiences versus courses or curricula.

Learning in the Flow of Work

Organizations are gravitating to "Learning in the Flow of Work" (LFW) and are currently building broad-based solutions and ecosystems that enable learning where learners often need it most, within their day-to-day work lives. Some key drivers for LFW include digital transformation, where access to a vast amount of learning resources (people, blogs, video, etc.) is immediately at our fingertips. The ability to obtain credible information on any topic within seconds is extraordinary. Content consumption habits brought on by the digital age also drive our personal need to search and find needed information.

The future of work also drives our need to learn rapidly as tasks and roles change continuously, forcing us to unlearn, re-skill, and up-skill quickly as needed. Real or perceived, the lack of time to learn is a compelling factor in the changing approach to learning and bringing learning seamlessly to the work environment only makes sense.

The Agile methodology provides L&D with the greatest opportunity to transform its existing thinking, practices, and processes to become more elastic. Speed, consumer-driven focus, business-centricity, and the digital revolution are all pushing L&D to adopt some form of agile into its daily practices. The concept of deploying a minimally viable product (MVP) to learning solutions is revolutionary. L&D has often been saddled with having to launch near perfect and complex solutions that take a long time to design, develop, and deliver. Today's consumer needs the learning today, to fulfill either a short-term need or their long-term development. Even compliance training is being rethought and enabling shorter, bite-sized micro-learning solutions that both teach and reinforce learning.

Leveraging "sprints" versus a traditional "waterfall" transformation approach allows L&D to move much faster and build out MVPs that the organization can start using faster, gain feedback, and then continuously build from there. Daily huddles, prototypes, and alpha and beta testing are other examples of how Agile is permeating L&D in its solution development. ALOs tend to think about learning solutions as products and employees as consumers. The role of the Learning Business Partner in many ways is shifting to that of a Product Manager.

Structured Learning

Despite the drive toward "learning in the flow of work" and digital content being everywhere, structured solutions are still being used by ALOs, and that's because they work. The real difference is around the use of learning journeys vs. traditional curricula. Utilizing the power of design thinking has enabled L&D to craft highly relevant, less time and location-constrained, and persona-driven learning journeys around key capability development areas. There is also an emphasis in modern learning programs on the entire learning experience, which a learning journey accommodates well. This often includes not only the content but also coaching, collaboration with peers and experts, simulations, and the actual work itself. As a "journey", it may

involve the application of that skill in the workplace and reporting back on progress. For example, if the goal is for sales to do better account planning, the program could include building and managing a plan in the CRM over a specified period. Learners could come back and share their experience and progress with others, while learning analytics could correlate actual sales activity based on data in the CRM related to that plan.

3 Conclusion

Business leaders globally are increasingly focusing on building a strong learning culture and building strong L&D teams who are more proactive and are well aligned to business objectives. L&D functions are increasingly becoming active partners with other business units where they **Collaborate**, **Co-operate** to build learning needs to enhance the **Capabilities** of its workforce as the ability to adapt is now a key requirement for businesses and the learning functions.

Following the **Sense, Decide, and Evolve** methodology, companies can transform themselves into an Adaptive Learning Organization that enables a proactive and fluid learning ecosystem. All these will require organizations to build a new way of thinking, tools and practices that are forward-looking.

Technologies are changing rapidly, which is contributing to changing customer behaviors and expectations. To respond to these changes, companies need to re-skill and up-skill their workforce for the future where there will be new challenges, opportunities in a connected world. Developing deep skills through immersive learning programs in new-age technologies and at the same time developing soft skills will be very crucial. Learning and Development departments are not seen as a cost center; rather they are now seen as a profit center where they are contributing equally through smart initiatives by **Running Training Like a Business**.

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