



Driving Performance & Productivity

Why Learning Organisations propel and sustain more impact

www.towardsmaturity.org/driving-performance-2018

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Supported by

CIPD

In-Focus
Report

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About this research

The Towards Maturity Benchmark Study is an internationally recognised longitudinal study exploring how effective learning innovation influences business impact. The findings are informed by the input of 6,500+ L&D leaders and 40,000+ learners gathered since 2003.

Data for this report is drawn from:

- ▶ The Towards Maturity 2017 Benchmark™ research with data from over 700 global L&D leaders, reported in *The Transformation Curve* (www.towardsmaturity.org/transformation2018), which is free to download thanks to the support of [Towards Maturity Ambassadors](#).
- ▶ Data from the Towards Maturity Learning Landscape™ research, gathered online during 2017 from a sample of over 10,000 learners. Findings from this learner research are **highlighted in purple**.

All the quotations in this report are from participants in the 2017 TM Benchmark



Each section in this report concludes with a case study or checklist to help L&D leaders use the evidence presented to turn insights into action.

This In-Focus Report is brought to you in association with our strategic partner, the CIPD.

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Foreword by Andy Lancaster

Performance and productivity, no matter what organisation or sector you work in, are two words that are likely to keep your senior managers awake at night. A focus on improvement is no longer an option if your organisation wants to survive.

The attention on organisational performance is being driven by a number of significant factors. The nature of work is changing with disruptive approaches undermining previously successful business models and past achievements no longer guarantee future success. Globalisation and technology are forcing organisations to embrace new competition and complex challenges. The workforce is at its most diverse with the greatest age range of workers than at any time in history resulting in a variety of needs. Employees are demanding more flexible working and the more frequent transition from one organisation to another creates a constantly evolving workforce. And, the necessity of fixed geographic workplaces is challenged by dispersed staff who must be supported to work and interact using virtual and online solutions.

Performance and productivity require a fresh approach to learning where the primary focus is on key business needs and KPIs. Learning cannot be driven by an old paradigm where staff attend an occasional face-to-face course, but by development that is embedded at the heart of the organisation on a daily basis.

For that to be a reality, senior leaders must act as champions of and role models for the learning process. Managers must define needs, facilitate the opportunities for development and monitor outcomes; learning should be high on every team's agenda. Learners, as the most important people in the process, should be intimately involved in learning design. As key stakeholders, their views on what learning is needed, how it's provided and when it's accessible are central to effective development.

L&D teams must revolutionise their approach. There must be a move to performance support where highly responsive, agile and iterative learning design processes are deployed. Learning solutions must be driven by data insights and provide learning 'in the flow' of work through videos, podcasts and blogs, technology and conversations in communities of practice.

This involves a change in learning culture in which individuals, managers and L&D teams are released to work together, share knowledge, solve problems and leverage innovative methods and technology to support the strategic goals of the organisation.

This report, a further landmark in the strategic research partnership between Towards Maturity and the CIPD, provides an evidence base for the characteristics and practical steps needed to facilitate learning that will drive performance and transformation in your organisational context.



Andy Lancaster
Head of L&D Content, CIPD

Fast Facts

For over 15 years, Towards Maturity has been investigating how learning innovation – done well – can deliver business impact. Our recent research, *The Transformation Curve*, reveals that **high performing learning organisations**, on average, are seeing a 24% increase in productivity and performance as a result of learning done well.

Top Deck organisations have, on average, increased their performance by 24%

Over 700 global L&D leaders participated in the 2017 Towards Maturity Benchmark. This report explores why and how some of these organisations achieve astounding improvements in productivity and performance and what the rest of us can do to get there. It investigates their approach in using technology, skills, collaboration, tactics and strategy, to achieve higher performance and productivity.

Our research finds that being pragmatic is what high performing learning organisations do best. These organisations strike a balance between rules, regulations and procedures and creativity, innovation.

As a result of learning innovation, in the **Top Deck**:

- **59%** increase productivity (30% average, 11% bottom quartile)
- **39%** drive business innovation (27%, 4%)
- **38%** improve talent strategies to keep the best people (17%, 7%)
- **47%** build capability of organisation to solve problems (19%, 3%)
- **48%** develop the learning culture within their organisation (20%, 6%)
- **68%** facilitate new ways of working (23%, 6%)

Setting goals

To sustain high performance and productivity, learning organisations embed a vision and release the capability of their people to achieve it.

Individuals

- **85%** to work together to solve problems (43% average, 13% bottom quartile)
- **71%** to productively connect and share knowledge (22%, 5%)

Managers

- **50%** managers encourage (and provide time for) reflection (14% average, 2% bottom quartile)
- **71%** equip line managers with the resources they need to help their team get the most out of learning (26%, 4%)

L&D

- **91%** are fully aligned with the strategic goals of the organisation (61% average, 21% bottom quartile)
- **76%** are confident in incorporating the use of new media in learning design (33%, 14%)

Getting there smarter

High performing learning organisations are **ten times more likely** than low performing companies to use learning analytics to improve the delivery of their services.

- **62%** routinely collect information on the extent to which learning points have been understood (30% average, 5% bottom quartile)
- **71%** collect information from learners on the extent to which learning points have been applied at work (24%, 2%)
- **56%** collect information from line managers on the extent to which learning points have been applied at work (16%, 0%)

In high performing organisations L&D know how to work together with the business to increase the impact of learning interventions.

- **79%** draw on business expertise in their organisation to support learning (e.g. marketing, data analytic experts) (38% average, 11% bottom quartile)
- **85%** use the information to regularly review their programmes and check that they support and enhance the organisational goal (46%, 10%)

Building ownership

To ensure that learning is successfully applied, high performing and productive organisations:

Understand

- **61%** encourage peer-to-peer feedback about the impact of learning (30% average, 9% bottom quartile)
- **76%** are proactive in understanding how their people currently learn (28%, 1%)

Involve

- **73%** involve learners in the design of the most appropriate learning solution (25%, 1%)
- **74%** involve managers in the design of the most appropriate learning solution (40%, 8%)
- **88%** ensure there is a communication plan in place for all key stakeholders (36%, 6%)

73%
of Top Deck
organisations
involve
learners in
the design of
the most
appropriate
learning
solution

Facilitate

- **74%** provide people with the means to prove competency for their job (32%, 6%)

Empowering people

To empower their learners, high performing learning organisations:

Support

- **64%** of L&D have performance consulting skills in-house (41% average, 18% bottom quartile)

Give permission

- **50%** of organisations encourage (and make time for) reflection (vs 14%, 2%)

Encourage by creating a holistic people experience

- **76%** provide learners with real-time feedback on progress (29% average, 4% bottom quartile)
- **56%** reward learners for their achievements (21%, 1%)
- **85%** provide a safe environment to share ideas and work out loud (41%, 14%)

Data from our Learner Landscape research highlights that people value being in control of their learning, both in terms of timing and location. Support and encouragement is also important, particularly coming from managers. Those afforded such flexibility and support often go above and beyond the call of duty.

- **94%** of learners like being able to learn at their own pace
- **68%** want to be able to access learning on the go
- **67%** of learners say their manager makes time for them to learn at work

In high performing learning organisations, managers encourage and make time for social and informal learning almost **five times** more than the average, and **twenty-six times** more than low performing organisations.

High performing organisations listen to what their employees say:

- **79%** of learners know what on-the-job support they need
- **91%** understand how their job contributes to the organisation's objectives

Organisations that proactively listen to their people are almost **three times** more likely to achieve business innovation than the average.

79%
of learners
know what
on-the-job
support they
need

1 Introduction

For over 15 years, Towards Maturity has been investigating how learning innovation – done well – can deliver business impact. Our recent research, *The Transformation Curve*, reveals that **high performing learning** organisations, on average, are seeing a 24% increase in productivity as a result of learning done well. This report explores what these organisations are doing differently to achieve astounding improvements in productivity and performance.

1.1 About this study

Through the Towards Maturity Benchmark¹ we explore how learning interventions lead to business benefits. To do this, we measure a number of specific KPIs, including productivity, that are of interest to both business leaders and L&D practitioners. This report highlights what we have found by focusing on organisations that are reporting high performance and productivity and those that aren't.

We analysed the results of over 700 L&D leaders and practitioners gathered through our Towards Maturity Benchmark². Specifically, we segmented the data into three groups: **Top Deck**³, average⁴, and companies with low performance and productivity⁵.

1.2 Setting the context

In a volatile and uncertain labour market, people are an organisation's most valuable asset. The world of work and workers continues to be challenging on all levels and therefore there has never been a more critical time for leadership to unleash the potential of its workforce.

Leaders who put people as their first priority in executive level conversations and decision-making will drive genuine performance culture. Leaders are at last demanding more evidence from their people professionals because too often transformative investments are failing when it comes to how people sustain productivity and performance levels.

¹ See www.towardsmaturity.org/benchmark

² See *The Transformation Curve* <https://towardsmaturity.org/2018/01/31/transformation/>

³ These are companies in the top 10% of the Towards Maturity Index

⁴ The average of all companies taking part in the Towards Maturity Benchmark in 2017

⁵ These are companies in the bottom 25% of the Towards Maturity Index

In a recent report *Driving the New Learning Organisation*⁶, we explored and established the principles guiding successful organisations: growth, transformation, productivity and profitability. At its core, the New Learning Organisation is characterised by a shared responsibility for learning by managers, staff and L&D. A revolution is required from leaders and people professionals. Talent and Learning must re-focus on their core purpose of bringing competitive advantage to organisations and excellent customer experiences.

What is the cost of not building high-performance practices into your organisation?

Consider the following question: *What are the risks of not building high-performance practices into your organisation?* The answer can be summarised in a single word: decline. In a highly competitive world, high performing organisations are gaining more and more competitive advantage, increasing market share, monopolising on opportunities, and shaping workplace culture. The opposite is true for low performing organisations, their likely path is extinction.

People professionals who help lead high performing learning organisations are leading the way in being proactive in understanding how their people currently learn what they need for their job (76% vs 28% average). High performing learning organisations are using both evidence and experience to bring, build and support people to be at their best.

Our latest research shows that less than half of business leaders recognise how their learning interventions are aligned with the overall business plan, so it is no surprise that Mckinsey's recent research⁷ is calling for a C-suite's revolution by asking leaders to consider: What does it take to lead an organization that truly unleashes its human capital?

This report investigates how L&D in high performing organisations connect with business leaders, engage learners, and in turn promote a culture of inclusion. It highlights how a blended approach using technology, skills, collaboration, and strategy, implemented collaboratively, leads to higher performance and productivity.

⁶ Driving the New Learning Organisation, 2017, <https://towardsmaturity.org/2017/05/03/in-focus-new-learning-organisation/>

⁷ See <https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/meeting-societys-expectations/solving-the-productivity-puzzle>

2 The New Learning Organisation

High performing learning organisations are achieving greater growth, productivity, profitability and better enabling business transformation. The performance gap between these organisations and the rest is widening. Most are not leveraging the full potential of their learning strategies or activities.

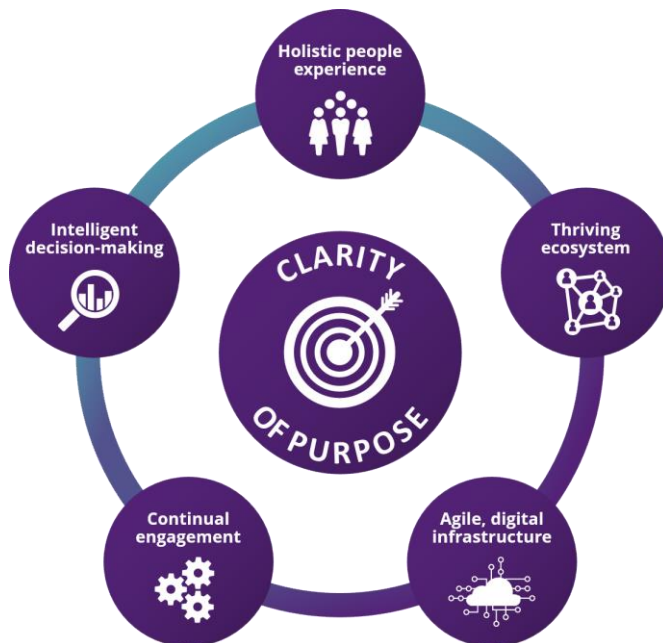
2.1 Characteristics of the New Learning Organisation

Since launching the New Learning Organisation research in 2017, we have analysed the market reaction and continued to gather insight and the commercial impact on business results.

What should be at the top of the agenda for the C-Suite, leaders and people professionals is the question *"Is our Talent and L&D approach driving performance and productivity?"* Whilst C-Suite leaders and people professionals are looking for this type of performance, only 1 in 3 participants in the 2017 Towards Maturity Benchmark can quantify their success.

Our 2017 research shows that the majority of professionals feel overwhelmed with only 17% saying they are confident to improve talent strategies to keep the best people and just 23% feel they can speed up and improve the application of learning back in the workplace.

Figure 1 Characteristics of the New Learning Organisation



Definition of the High Performing Learning Organisations:

A living and learning organisational ecosystem that has the ability to continuously transform itself and thrive in a rapidly changing environment

High performing learning organisations (the **Top Deck**⁸) are continuing to show significantly higher results. They are leveraging their L&D strategy and tracking consistently higher business impact against four critical areas, increasing **growth** in a competitive world, improving **productivity, profitability** and enabling **transformation**.

Our research with over 700 L&D leaders shows that **Top Deck** organisations are delivering the results that are critical to businesses. Through our 2017⁹ research we identified 6 characteristics that drive and propel impact.

This year we analysed hundreds of tactics to find out what L&D professionals can do to improve performance and productivity. Based on the 6 characteristics of the New Learning Organisation, this report highlights only the tactics that have a strong correlation with improvements in productivity and performance. We present a summary of each characteristic and the tactics that have the strongest impact on performance and productivity.

Growth



The Top Deck are **three times more likely** than the average to report achieving benefits related to growth in competitive climate. For example, they are almost 3x as likely to report that learning innovation has resulted in an impact on business innovation (**39%** vs 14% average) and 2x as likely to report improvement with staff motivation (**55%** vs 23%)

Profitability



The Top Deck are **two times more likely** to report achieving benefits related to improved sustainability and profitability including improving customer satisfaction (**61%** vs 37%) and overall organisational performance (**47%** vs 25%)

Transformation



The Top Deck are **two times more likely** to report achieving benefits to help them respond faster to change (**39%** vs 18%) and build the capability of the organisation to solve problems (**47%** vs 19%).

Productivity



The Top Deck are **two times more likely** to report achieving benefits linked to improving overall productivity including improving talent strategies to keep their best people (**38%** vs 17%) and improving on the job productivity (**59%** vs 30%).

Read the next chapter and find out how **Top Deck** organisations are driving performance and productivity through learning innovation. Explore how high performing learning organisations have revolutionised their approach to L&D by setting goals, using data to make intelligent decisions, building ownership, and empowering their people.

⁸ These are companies in the top 10% of the Towards Maturity Index.

⁹ Driving the New Learning Organisation, 2017, <https://towardsmaturity.org/2017/05/03/in-focus-new-learning-organisation/>

3 Driving Performance & Productivity

To improve performance and productivity, organisations must examine their current results and behaviours, recognise what needs to be done differently, explore new ideas, and consciously change – culturally and strategically – based on evidence.

We have analysed 44 tactics that are strongly correlated with improvements in productivity and performance. The evidence we uncovered will allow you to start your journey to become a high performing learning organisation. The transformation is driven by the following four themes that will be explored in detail:

- Setting goals
- Getting there smarter!
- Building ownership
- Empowering people

3.1 Setting goals

People spend **one third** of their life at work. Without a formalised cause, an inspiring ethos, a company will struggle to retain, engage, or bring the best out of their employees. High performing learning organisations understand this. They have well-defined visions and higher engagement levels highlighting the reason for the organisation's existence, its cause, and inspire others to come along on the journey.

There is no one business or management practice that consistently leads to performance or productivity improvements. Indeed, a Harvard Business School study examining the effects of over 200 well-established management practices on corporate success in 160 companies found none in particular had any direct causal relationship to superior business performance¹⁰.

In the above study, there were a number of basic management practices that, without exception, characterised organisations that consistently outperformed their industry competitors. Among these were **culture and execution**. In other words, organisations that *talk the talk* but also *walk the walk* see higher performance and productivity from their employees.

So, how do high performing and productive organisations set direction?

¹⁰ Performance: The Secrets of Successful Behaviour, R. Stuart-Kotze, 2006

85%
of senior managers in **Top Deck** companies demonstrate a commitment to learning

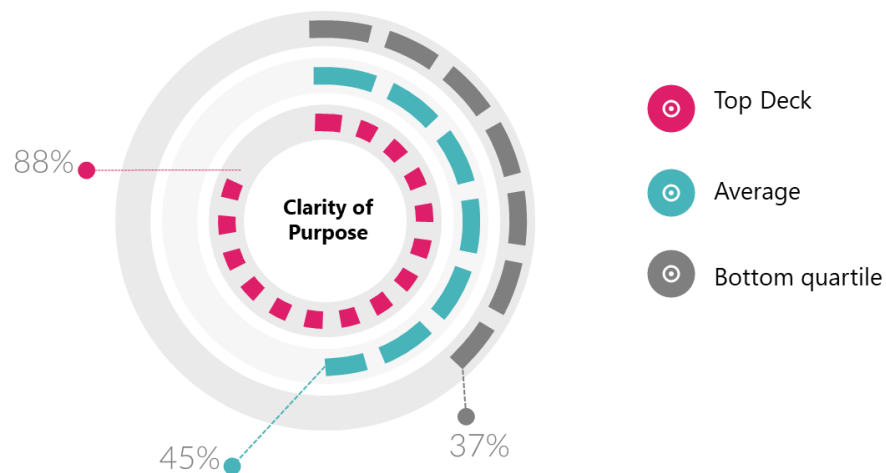
Clarity of Purpose

Clarity of purpose is a central characteristic of the New Learning Organisation. It is through a common purpose that stakeholders – L&D, managers, senior executives – are able to collaborate effectively and support learning outcomes.

By setting direction through a collaborative approach, high performing learning organisations establish a connection between their L&D professionals and the wider business. As key stakeholders are involved in the process of translating business strategy into a learning strategy, senior managers begin showing a clear commitment to learning. **Top Deck** organisations are **five times** more likely to see this happen.

Our data shows that a clear commitment to learning by senior managers is strongly correlated with higher performance and productivity.

Figure 2 Clarity of Purpose



Clarity of Purpose

A shared vision and open dialogue on how people are valued and need to adapt to deliver the organisation's performance

We have analysed a number of variables that have a direct correlation on driving business results. There are 2 tactics that have a very strong correlation to productivity and are linked to clarity of purpose that we can't afford to ignore:

- **91%** of L&D say business leaders recognise that their learning interventions are aligned with the overall business plan (43% average, 11% bottom quartile)
- **88%** the objectives and aims of learning are discussed with individuals before they start learning (38%, 13%)

Top Deck organisations continue to focus on areas that are not new, but are critical. It is clear from the research that the majority of organisations have become complacent when it comes to clarifying the purpose of learning and the

expectations of leaders as well as individuals. Revisiting these simple yet effective tactics will increase performance and productivity.

We have high aspirations for linking learning to organisational performance but worryingly over 90% of organisations cannot quantify how their work is linked to organisational growth, transformation, productivity and profitability.

One recommendation to address this is to start by supporting managers to help their teams to understand how their work impacts the bottom line. This then makes sure that your learning interventions are designed to support that process.

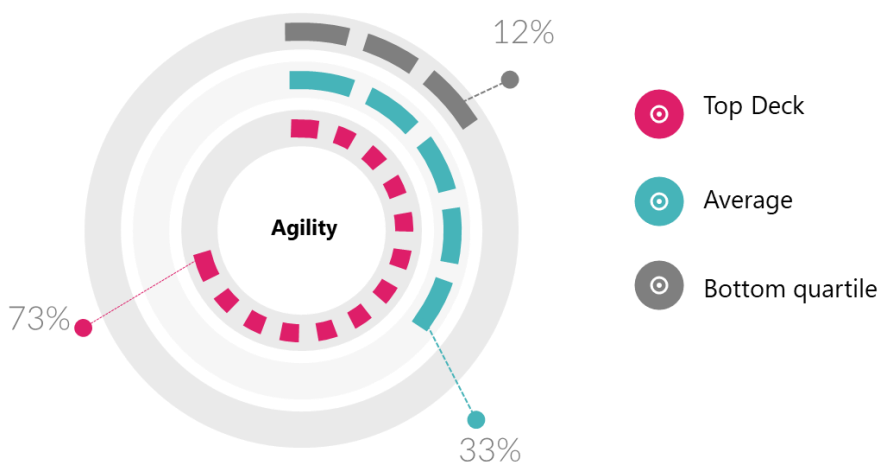
Start in one of the areas of your organisation and once established, support managers to embed these tactics. **Top Deck** organisations are doing this and it is paying off as their staff are clear about how their work is linked to the organisation's performance.

- **91%** employees understand how their work is linked to the organisation's performance (51%, 23%)

Agile, digital infrastructure

High performing organisations excel in pragmatic decision making. Whilst rules and regulations have their place, innovation, which is a key for performance improvement, can be limited by a fixed mind-set and immovable procedures. Creativity must be fostered and released.

Figure 3 Agility



Agile
A virtual environment that enables a fluid exchange of knowledge, ideas and the adaptation of competence

Organisations that achieve agility build networked and boundaryless people practices that allow people to connect, collaborate and share knowledge. This characteristic has a number of variables through which high performing learning organisations have created people-centric models for learning that allow and create an agile knowledge economy. This means looking at on-demand tools, platforms and communities of practice to continuously evolve.

L&D leaders who adopt agile L&D models and create a mindset of iterative development methodologies are more successful and report providing faster response to changing business conditions (**39%** Top Deck, 18% average, 5% bottom quartile).

The rise of ‘consumer’ led learning opportunities outside of the workplace has been unprecedented in the last 18 months. Understanding how your learners are using these channels to share ideas will allow you to learn about why they are utilised and what elements could be valuable to improve your organisation’s agility through learning. Knowing how your staff are learning outside of the work environment helps you shape learning that is engaging and up-to-date.

- **55%** report that they are aware of how their learners are using social media (outside of L&D) to share ideas (17% average, 4% bottom quartile)

In **Top Deck** organisations these are some of the tactics that are directly linked to improvements in productivity and performance:

Individuals are released

- **85%** to work together to solve problems (vs 43% average, 13% bottom quartile)
- **71%** to work together to productively connect and share knowledge (22%, 5%)

A learning culture that encourages innovation and promotes collaboration is key for making employees feel valued. High performing learning organisations recognise that empowering employees in problem solving and learning is key to keeping the best people (**38%** high performers vs 17% average, 7% low performers). Additionally, such organisations are **ten times more likely** to drive business innovation than low performing companies.

Managers are involved

A study exploring the behaviours of a hundred or so managers in a Canadian utility company for a period of seven years found that those that changed their behaviour to meet changing demands were more productive¹¹. The opposite was true for those that who maintained relatively unchanged behaviour – their productivity became stagnant or they simply left the company.

Leadership requires strategic thinking, a growth mindset and being open to innovation. Effective leaders build engagement, drive accountability, and ultimately deliver results. But, they also need to work cooperatively with their

38%
of **Top Deck**
have
improved
their talent
strategies to
keep the best
people

¹¹ Performance: The Secrets of Successful Behaviour, R. Stuart-Kotze, 2006

peers and recognise the collaborative strength of their organisation. L&D professionals can support this:

- **50%** of L&D agree that managers encourage (and provide time for) reflection (vs 14% average, 2% bottom quartile)
- **71%** equip line managers with the resources they need to help their team get the most out of learning (26%, 4%)

L&D are strategic

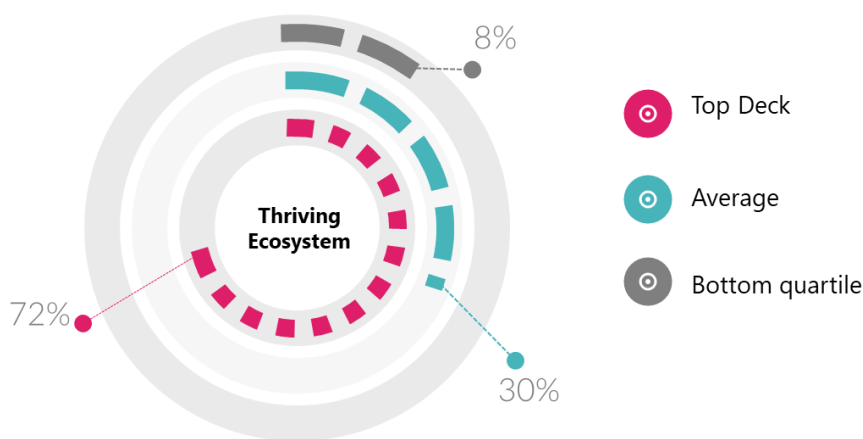
A clear characteristic of high performing organisations is that they are effective at translating their business strategy into a compelling people strategy. In such organisations, L&D practitioners are confident and able to understand business priorities and create learning solutions to address those needs. L&D in high performing and productive companies are:

- **76%** confident in incorporating the use of new media in learning design (33%, 14%)

Thriving Ecosystem

High performing learning organisations resonate trust; the foundation for releasing individuals, managers and L&D teams. A thriving ecosystem of collaboration and innovation demands the confidence and empowerment of staff.

Figure 4 Thriving Ecosystem



Thriving Ecosystem
 A people led system that enables its people, teams and the extended enterprise to thrive and learn linked to common goals

Creating an ecosystem where people are empowered and can thrive to perform will drive more sustainable results. The **Top Deck** are significantly ahead when it comes to integrating learning and expertise into the ecosystem and not trying to force things to happen the other way around. In order to improve performance and productivity, **Top Deck** organisations ensure:

- **65%** of managers provide active support in the application of learning in the workflow (16% average, 1% bottom quartile)
- **82%** help people locate in-house experts when they need them (36%, 8%)

It is no surprise that managers who receive regular updates on how learning has increased performance are engaged in driving learning. It is one of the most common frustrations managers air. With only **55%** of **Top Deck** organisations doing this, L&D have a huge opportunity to drive higher performance and productivity levels with this small change.

- **55%** we regularly communicate performance impacts to line managers and supervisors (23%, 4%)

Start to drive performance and productivity

- Align learning goals with the organisations goals
- Set leaders and managers up for success by supporting them to drive performance and productivity through every team member
- Consistently measure and communicate the success or actions required to deliver against the goals
- Give people space and time to connect, collaborate and share
- Trust the capabilities and expertise of your staff

3.2 Getting there smarter

Clear purpose is the first step to improving performance. We then need to work out how to get there faster.

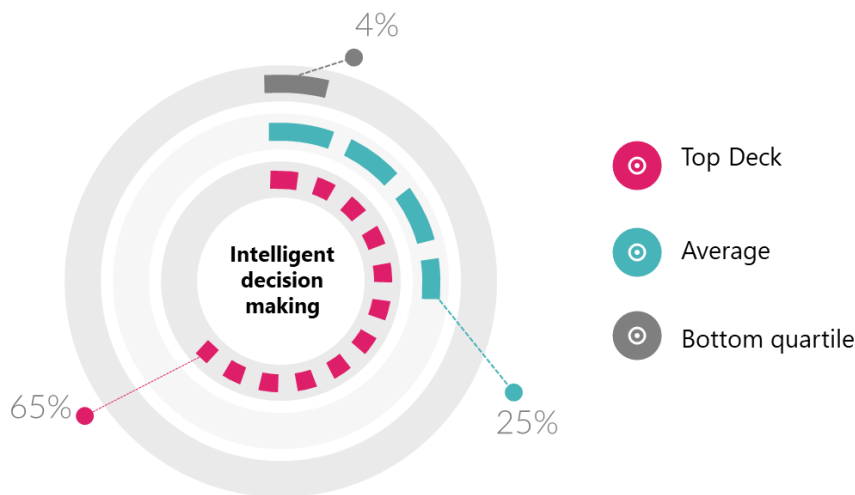
How can we be sure that we have arrived at a destination if we have no clear starting point and direction, and no way of measuring progress? Whilst strategic direction is key for performance it must be underpinned by information and insights that ensure intelligent decisions are being made.

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it – Peter Drucker

Collecting, analysing, and using organisational data to inform decision-making is clearly linked to driving higher performance and productivity.

And yet, L&D have been slow to react and integrate the value of using data and analytics. The **Top Deck** are significantly ahead but we still need to see them develop this area of expertise further (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Intelligent decision-making



Intelligent decision making

A robust platform using insight and performance analytics to drive organisational performance and customer experience

In a competitive world, benchmarking¹² is a tool that accelerates business results. It is all about measuring and improving the quality of an organisation’s performance. With only 18% of organisations taking this approach it is no surprise we are failing to drive performance and productivity through our learning initiatives.

- **52%** we benchmark our learning strategy and practices against other companies in our industry (18% average, 2% bottom quartile)

3.1.1 How data helps

High performing organisations routinely collect data and information from across the business with a specific goal to inform learning design, delivery and impact. For example:

- **62%** routinely collect information on the extent to which learning points have been understood (30% average, 5% bottom quartile)
- **71%** collect information from learners on the extent to which learning points have been applied at work (24%, 2%)

High performing and productive organisations are **ten times more likely** than low performing companies to use learning analytics to improve the delivery of their services. They are intentional in how they collect data and use it to create meaningful impact.

“Data has the power to help us plan, to predict, to prescribe, to persuade and to perform. Traditionally L&D have been nervous of using data, often equating it to the holy grail of demonstrating ROI. We often miss the opportunity that data and evidence provides to open conversations with stakeholders that in turn open the door to change. High performing organisations are beginning to embrace the power that data has to influence and inform rather than shy away from it”

Laura Overton

CEO, Towards Maturity

¹² See www.towardsmaturity.org/benchmark

Recognising gaps

High performing learning organisations recognise that L&D professionals do not have all the answers. Compared with low performers, L&D in high performing organisations are confident in approaching the business and gaining insights that drive a future focused development strategy.

50%
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- **79%** draw on business expertise in their organisation to support learning (e.g. marketing, data analytic experts) (38% average, 11% bottom quartile)
- **85%** use the information to regularly review their programmes and check that they support and enhance the organisational goal (46%, 10%)

In the Towards Maturity Benchmark we collect information on over 50 goals and benefits that organisations are looking to achieve through learning innovation. The above two actions alone are strongly correlated with over 20 of these benefits.

By using data analytics, high performing learning organisations:

- Build capability of organisation to solve problems
- Speed up and improve the application of learning in the workplace
- Reduce time away from the job

“Learning analytics has so many uses – For example; I know a lot of organisations who are trying to evolve the relevance of their functions by focusing on using data to evidence the impact of their activities. This is a great starting point in a transitional strategy. Examining some of our own solutions through the lens of a balanced business-scorecard, for example, has helped us prove that quality is maintained whilst access and cost are reduced. It is important to make informed evidence-based decisions as the profession develops. Traditional L&D may continue to talk about volume of activity, completions, compliance and course catalogue; but traction is gained when the conversation shifts to tangible, evidenced business-outputs of the learning process – effectiveness, productivity, sustainability, growth”

Jonathan Holmes

Learning and Development Manager, NFU Mutual

Start to drive performance and productivity

Data is at the heart of the intelligent decision making that drives high performing and productive organisations. It provides a common language for L&D and business to spearhead impactful learning programmes, promote meaningful changes to strategy and evidence impact.

Do you ...

- Audit what data you currently collect and how you use it
- Develop new capabilities for data collection and analysis
- Embed a data-driven approach to decision-making
- Combine internal data with external evidence to open new conversations with your stakeholders

3.3 Building ownership

3.1.2 Success involves creating ownership

A simple but effective characteristic of high performing and productive companies is the *'ask rather than insist'* culture. By simply involving all relevant stakeholders – through the use of technology – companies increase engagement through ownership (see Figure 6).

A greater voice in the organisational decisions that affect your job can make people feel better about their work. It can also add a more collegiate environment between management and staff, boosting the feeling of fulfilment and increasing productivity – The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practice¹³

Worryingly, employee engagement surveys still show that over 85% of people are disengaged at work. This figure has not changed for over 10 years. Learning and development opportunities are cited within the top 3 reasons for this level of disengagement¹⁴.

Top Deck organisations are not perfect but are significantly ahead with understanding that people are bombarded with diverse content on a daily basis, making it difficult for L&D to compete with this level of consumerism. L&D do not have the budget or resources to compete but the **Top Deck** are thinking smarter

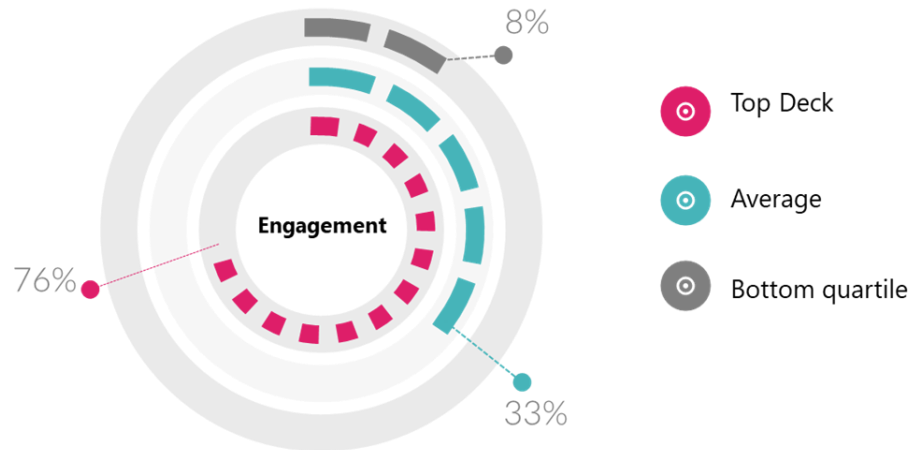
¹³ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices>

¹⁴ Gallup 2017 (<http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/188033/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx>)

and using what resources they do have better and driving impactful and sustainable results through engaging activities.

Figure 6 Learner Engagement

Continual Engagement
A dynamic community that continually builds on business relationships resulting in energy, resilience and growth



The **Top Deck** organisations lead the way when it comes to gathering market intelligence on how people learn:

- **76%** are proactive in understanding how our people currently learn what they need for their job (28% average, 1% bottom quartile)

Resources spent on understanding your market pays dividends. **Top Deck** learning organisation Brambles found that taking time to understand how their staff learn prior to a major change initiative, accelerated their learning transformation by 18 months.

Completing the Learning Landscape gave us a much clearer view on our learners, the insights gathered enabled us to accelerate our strategy and deliver desired results around 18 months early – Lynn Rutherford, Group VP L&D at Brambles

Owning the results

The aim is to align learning to context; the stronger the alignment the more likely individuals will retain the skills they have learned over time and apply them to their work. To ensure that learning is successfully applied, high performing and productive organisations:

Understand

- **61%** ensure peer-to-peer feedback about the impact of learning (30% average, 9% bottom quartile)

- **76%** are proactive in understanding how their people currently learn (28%, 1%)

Involve

- **73%** involve learners in the design of the most appropriate learning solution (25%, 1%)
- **74%** involve managers in the design of the most appropriate learning solution (40%, 8%)
- **88%** ensure there is a communication plan in place for all key stakeholders (35%, 6%)

Facilitate

- **74%** provide people with the means to prove competency for their job (32%, 6%)

Sharing responsibility

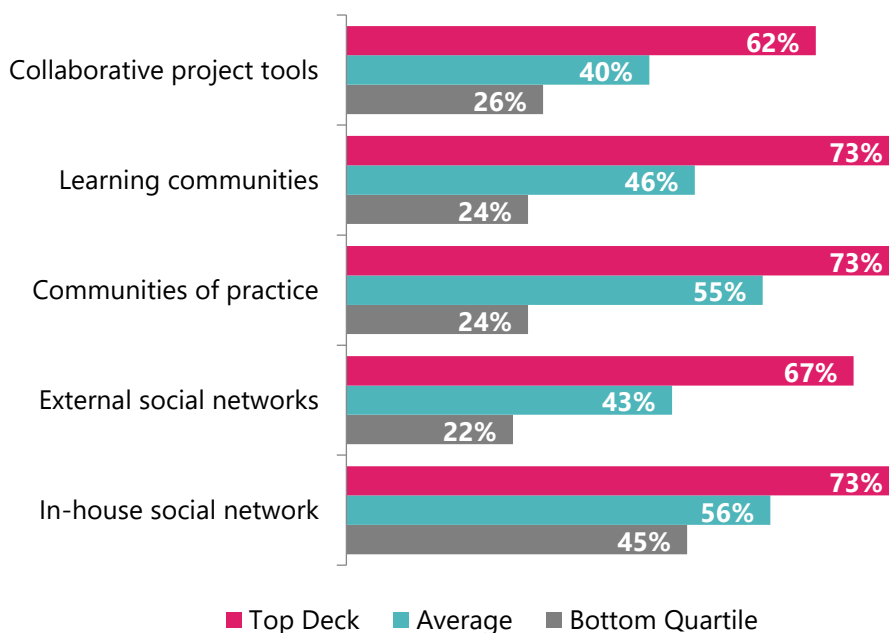
L&D professionals are increasingly talking about collaborative learning technologies. Our research shows that technology alone does not influence performance and productivity in organisations. Indeed, high performance is achieved by considering a combination of technology, strategy and context. What makes a difference is when people own the responsibility to connect, share and contribute.

“Any organisation that believes “talent attracts talent” needs to be considering how it uses the expertise and experience of its employees to support its learning and development agenda. By showcasing our colleagues in our most recent digital learning initiatives, we’ve also been able to demonstrate that “talent develops talent”

Peter Yarrow

Global Head of Learning & Propositions, Standard Life Aberdeen

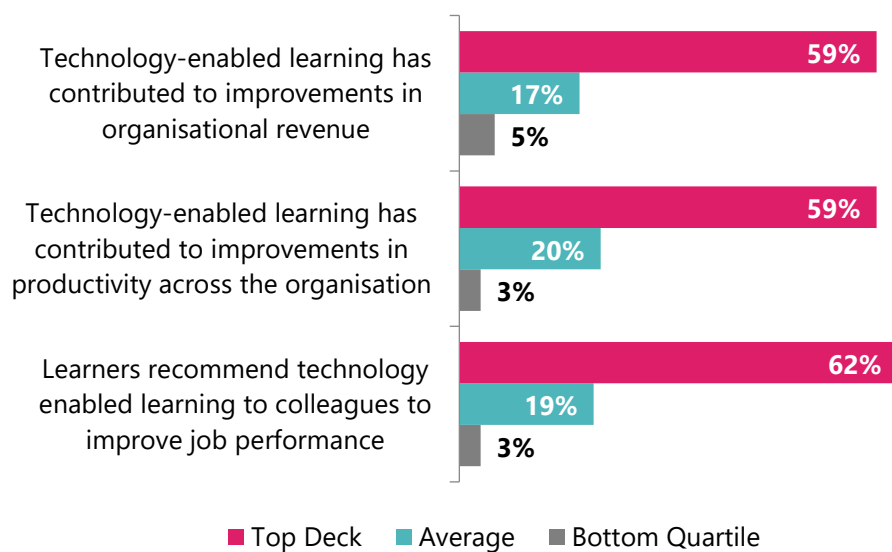
Figure 7 Use of collaborative and social technologies



Those organisations delivering high performance manage to establish an environment where technology releases the potential of individuals. They use technology to share responsibility across the organisation and promote a space to work together and share knowledge.

Technology can have an impact on productivity and performance only if individuals are engaged, inspired and motivated. **Top Deck** organisations use technology to create connections, facilitate discussions, and promote impact through actions.

Figure 8 Benefits of using technology well



Technology is seen as more than just a tool, it is an integral part of organisational strategy and part of a blended approach to improve revenue, productivity, and performance (see Figure 8).

By *asking* rather than *insisting*, high performing learning organisations understand their people, establish ways of gathering feedback, involve key stakeholders, and finally provide the opportunity to apply what has been learnt. In such circumstances, engagement develops organically through ownership and commitment.

The ultimate result is the full utilisation of learning technology. Among the many benefits achieved by using technology as part of a wider strategy, high performing learning organisations are able to facilitate new ways of working (**68%** vs 23% average), increase learning access and flexibility (**76%** vs 43%), and integrate the ability to personalise learning programmes (**48%** vs 24%).

Case study - PwC

At PwC, the team behind its social network and collaboration platform 'Spark' were not prescriptive about how and when each country or section should launch the new platform. This gave each territory ownership of the launch process and ultimately of their local 'Spark' site.

Paula Young, Global Head of Knowledge Management at PwC explains:

We didn't do a big global push. I allowed every territory to launch when they wanted and in any way that suited them, and that really worked. For example, in Switzerland there was a new Territory Senior Partner so they launched Spark when he started and it became part of the new Chairman's legacy.

Looking at the Learning and Education (L&E) function within PwC, their remit is designed to cover three areas:

- ▶ **Transformation:** Leadership of the PwC research and development agenda on learning technologies
- ▶ **Adoption:** Consultancy with territories and groups on learning strategies and development and delivery of global content
- ▶ **Foundation:** Management of core systems powering learning across the organisation

Adoption deals with the promotion of ownership and buy-in from all business units. This is crucial to the success of any learning programme.

Sarah Lindsell, discussing the research and development area within L&E function in PwC, explains:

One of our functions is to look at things and then analyse them to decide whether or not it's right for PwC at this particular time. It's not so much just the transformation from the learning strategy standpoint; so, "What different educational methods are we using?" and "When we're talking about creating a blended learning solution, what do we do with that? How do we push it?"

Source: <https://towardsmaturity.org/2015/04/15/evolving-ld-at-pwc/> and The Digital Renaissance of Work, Routledge, 2016

3.4 Empowering people

A significant objective of high performing and productive organisations is to release the energy and commitment of capable people. Individuals are given the freedom to do what they believe is best for the company and its customers and, most importantly, given the tools and the time to do so.

Nothing saps a person's energy and vitality more than being shepherded, cossetted, regulated and nannied¹⁵

High performing and productive organisations ensure that their learners are:

Supported

- **64%** of L&D have performance consulting skills in-house (vs 41% average, 18% bottom quartile)

Provide permission

- **50%** encourage (and make time for) reflection (vs 14%, 2%)

Encourage by creating a holistic people experience

- **76%** provide learners with real-time feedback on progress (vs 29%, 4%)
- **56%** reward learners for their achievements (vs 21%, 1%)

“Lots of us achieve goals with the help of apps. Whether they monitor finances, diet, or even sleep, we’re provided with real-time feedback on how our behaviour has affected progress. This feedback encourages self-assessment, empowering us to either adopt new behaviours or continue with ones that prove successful. The end result: self-driven behaviour change! If learners have goals, real-time feedback (whether digitally enabled or not) is fundamental to them being empowered to achieve the goal in the *quickest possible time*. The alternative is like a game of battleships where players delay (or refuse!) telling each other whether they’ve hit or missed”

Thomas Fowler

Senior e-Learning Designer, LV=

3.1.3 Role of individuals in improving performance and productivity through learning

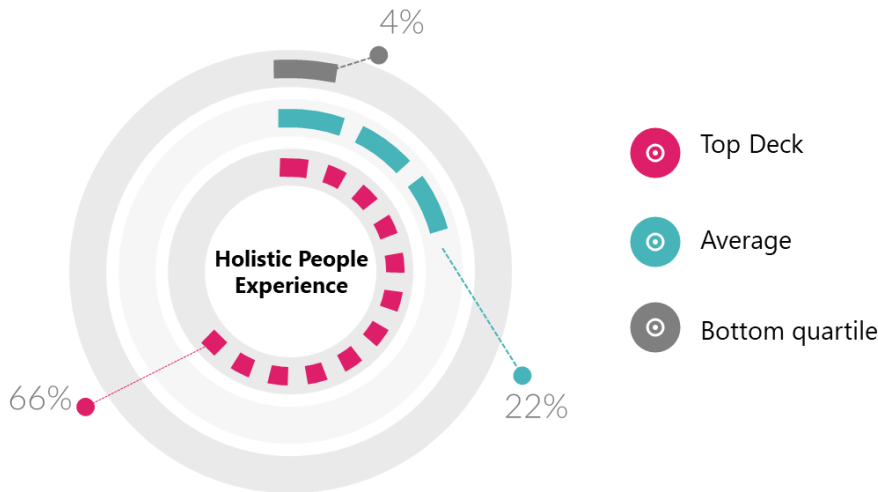
Well-run companies recognise the importance of the people who work for them¹⁶. For high performing and productive organisations talking *with* people in open conversation is the standard rather than the exception. Indeed, individuals are active participants helping embed strategy into practice.

¹⁵ Performance: The Secrets of Successful Behaviour, 2006

¹⁶ Good Work, The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practice

A holistic people experience is a significant characteristic of high performing and productive companies and one of the six characteristics of the *New Learning Organisation*.

Figure 9 Differences in Holistic People Experience



Holistic People Experience

A trusted brand that keeps to its promises and develops innovative, commercial and continuous learning opportunities

Ultimately performance is owned by individuals, managers and leaders. The purpose and role of L&D is to bring competitive advantage to their organisation through world-class talent and L&D practices. Our budgets are increasing but our ability to support the continual learning process is not.

- **76%** we use defined performance support practices to support learning transfer after formal learning (18% average, 1% bottom quartile)
- **50%** our organisation encourages (and provides time for) reflection (14%, 2%)

Our research with 10,000+ learners has uncovered that only **14%** of them have experienced blended learning. There are many new techniques that can be blended into an 'experience' to allow the application of learning. L&D must improve their ability to create more 'sophisticated blends'. Even our **Top Deck** organisations need to improve on their use of blended approaches, with only 37% stating it is their preferred method of choice.

- **71%** of L&D apply techniques such as spaced learning to aid retention and application of learning (19%, 6%)

High performing and productive organisations give a meaningful say to their employees, encourage and facilitate flexible work and, as a result, release their people from inertia and rules that stifle the very people they depend on.

14%
of learners
have
experienced
blended
learning

Provide a meaningful say at work

People are most likely to enjoy what they do when they have a meaningful say at work – The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practice

Based on the Learner Voice, which in 2017 alone collected data from over 10,000 employees, on average:

- **36%** of learners are consulted about the design of the most appropriate learning approach
- **57%** feel their feedback on online learning available is valued
- **60%** believe it is easy for them to contribute new ideas in the workplace

To improve employee perceptions about the organisation, high performing and productive companies are **twice as likely** than the average to provide a safe space for individuals to share ideas and collaborate.

- **85%** provide a safe environment to share ideas and work out loud (41% average, 14% bottom quartile)

Encourage flexibility

Encouraging flexible work is good for everyone and has been shown to have a positive impact on productivity, retention and quality of work – The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practice

Data from our Learner Voice highlights that people value being in control of their learning, both in terms of timing and location. This does not necessarily mean that they are left to their own devices. Support and encouragement is important, particularly coming from managers. Those afforded such flexibility and support often go above and beyond the call of duty.

- **94%** of learners like being able to learn at their own pace
- **68%** want to be able to access learning on the go
- **67%** of learners say their manager makes time for them to learn at work

In high performing and productive organisations, managers encourage and make time for social and informal learning almost **five times** more than the average, and **twenty-six times** more than low performing organisations. This tactic has a strong correlation with improved performance and productivity.

53%
of managers
in Top Deck
organisations
encourage
and make
time for social
and informal
learning

Overcome inertia

We often see in our data staff of rulebound, bureaucratic organisations that have developed a feeling of helplessness. In the face of archaic, non-pragmatic rules, people lose their ability to be creative in situations that demand creativity¹⁷.

It is a *'insist rather than ask'* culture that creates a stagnant workplace environment. High performing organisations listen to what their people say. Typically, workers have reported that they:

- **79%** know what on-the-job support they need
- **91%** understand how their job contributes to the organisation's overall objective

Organisations that proactively listen to their people are almost **three times** more likely to achieve business innovation than the average, and **ten times** more likely than low performing companies.

3.1.4 The L&D glue

Several studies – amongst them a recent one commissioned by Filtered and conducted by London Economics¹⁸ – show that there is a clear relationship between skills and performance. Indeed, between 40% to 70% of companies surveyed by London Economics indicated there was a minor and/or major impact on their productivity and performance due to a skills gap. Figure 10 highlights the differences in L&D capability between high (**Top Deck**) and low performers (bottom quartile).

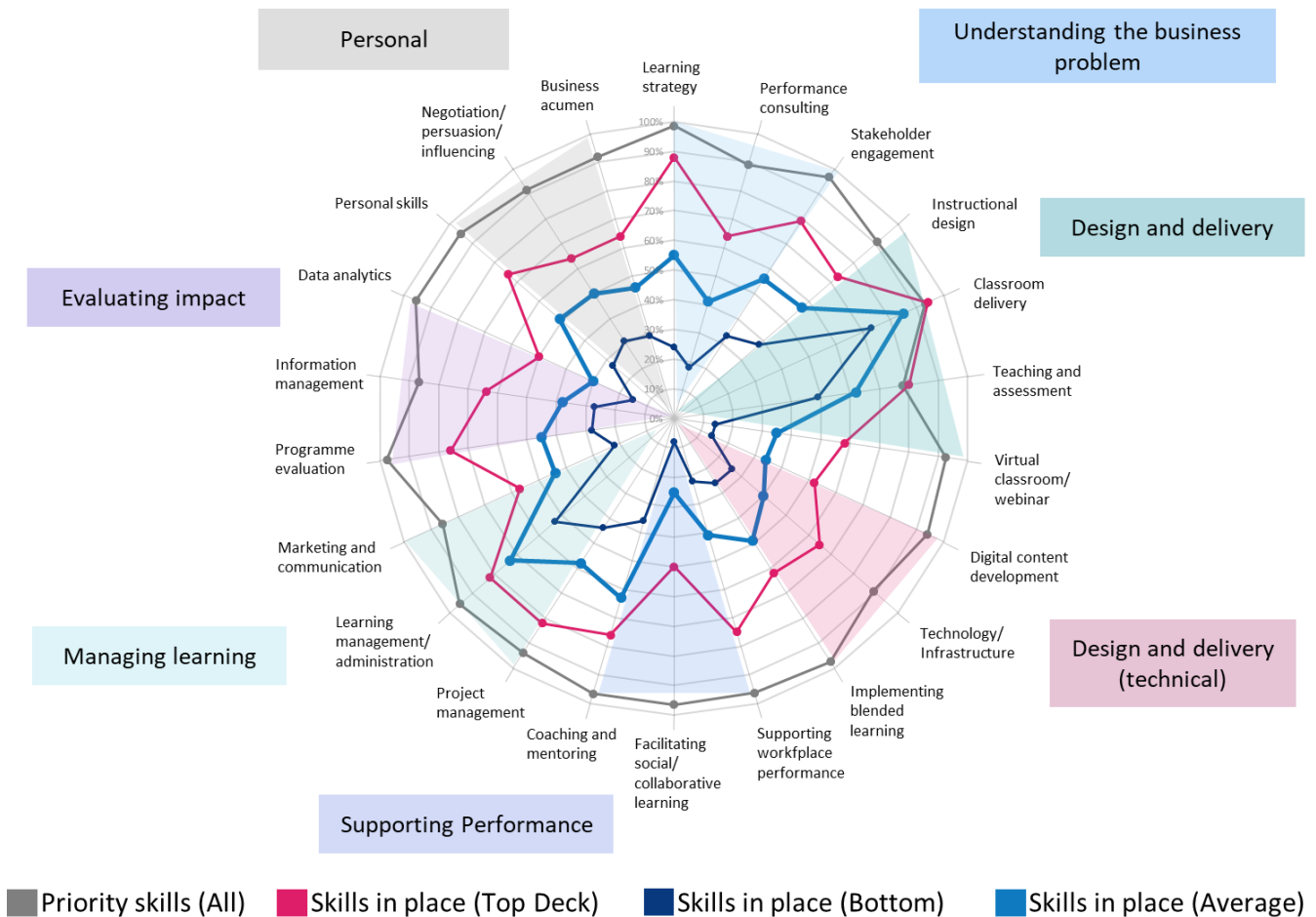
To support the business in improving performance and productivity, L&D must have the right capabilities in place and be confident to use them. They need to facilitate and build skills that reach out to the business. The New Learning Organisation adopts a shared sense of responsibility that recognises the agency of all stakeholders involved. Success is achieved through collaboration. When the 'timing is right', working together with managers and senior leaders creates commitment¹⁹; L&D leaders champion initiatives and lead by example.

¹⁷ Breaking Mediocrity and Complacency in Bureaucratic Service Cultures: How to close the performance gap by transforming expectations. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21688>

¹⁸ An economic assessment of skill gaps in firm productivity - <https://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/economic-assessment-skill-gaps-firm-productivity-november-2017/>

¹⁹ Middle management's strategic influence and organizational performance, Journal of Management Studies 34:3, 1997 – S. W. Floyd & B. Wooldridge

Figure 10 Differences in L&D Skills



High performing learning organisations are led by leaders who learn²⁰. The L&D industry is in flux and overwhelmed and under-skilled.

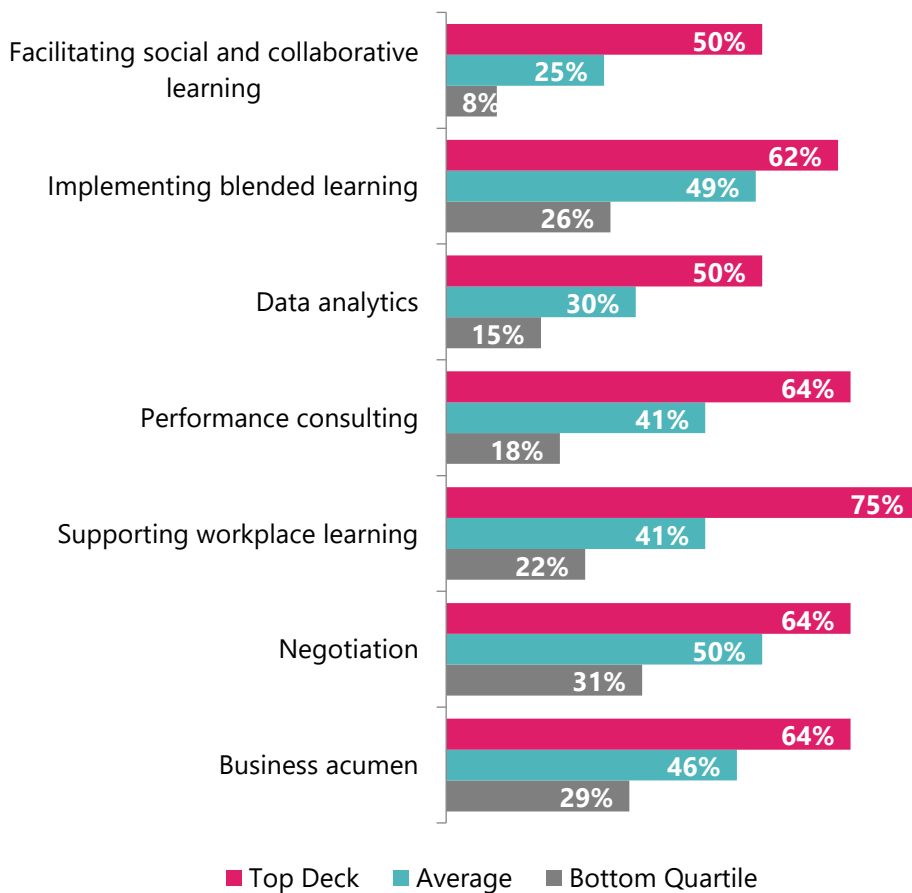
Figure 10 highlights the L&D skills that are consistently in place in **Top Deck** organisations. When looking at average and bottom quartile organisations, less than 50% of L&D professionals have the ability to consistently drive the 7 key priorities we have highlighted for modern professionals (see figure 11). The C-Suite want expertise but due to the lack of investment towards L&D professionals getting the right skills they are starting to look beyond L&D into other parts of the business (e.g. change agents and external experts).

L&D need to reclaim their purpose and bring competitive advantage to their organisations. Invest in the 7 areas in figure 11 as a priority. L&D leaders and teams must fit their own masks before helping others.

²⁰ See <https://towardsmaturity.org/2016/11/19/unlocking-potential-business-learning-benchmark/>

L&D practitioners that focus on strategic L&D and have the skills to deliver quality learning, measure its impact, and work together with stakeholders to sustain its benefits, promote a culture of involvement. This leads to two significant benefits. First, managers recognise the value of social learning and encourage it (65% Top Deck vs 11% bottom quartile). Second, business leaders recognise that learning is aligned with the business goals (91% Top Deck vs 11% bottom quartile).

Figure 11 L&D Knowledge and Capabilities



A clear pattern emerges when L&D have the right skills to engage not only employees but also managers and business leaders. In such circumstances, success becomes a shared responsibility where stakeholders are committed and work together towards a common goal. In high performing and productive organisations, L&D blend the resources available to them and produce a holistic approach to organisational problems. They align learning to business needs.

4 How do we become a high learning performing organisation?

The tactics and strategies embedded in the Towards Maturity Model²¹ underpin the high performing learning organisation – the more they become everyday practice the more business impact that learning innovation delivers. A feature of the New Learning Organisation is that it is constantly evolving as it responds to change. Our evidence over the years has shown that the journey towards maturity is not a simple one – there are complex factors at work that get in the way. Getting there is not a single stage process²².

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success – Henry Ford

Top Deck organisations, those in the top 10% of the Towards Maturity Index, are continually evolving their learning strategy in line with business. They are willing to change and take risks, championing new ways of working and learning, even when everything is ‘working’ just fine.

Indeed, many Top Deck organisations make progress in some areas but not in others. However, **the benefits significantly outweigh the barriers!**

Throughout this report we presented the tactics that are strongly correlated with improving performance and productivity. Figure 12 summarises the top tactics for each of the 6 characteristics of the New Learning Organisation that have a significant impact on performance and productivity.

Start to drive performance and productivity

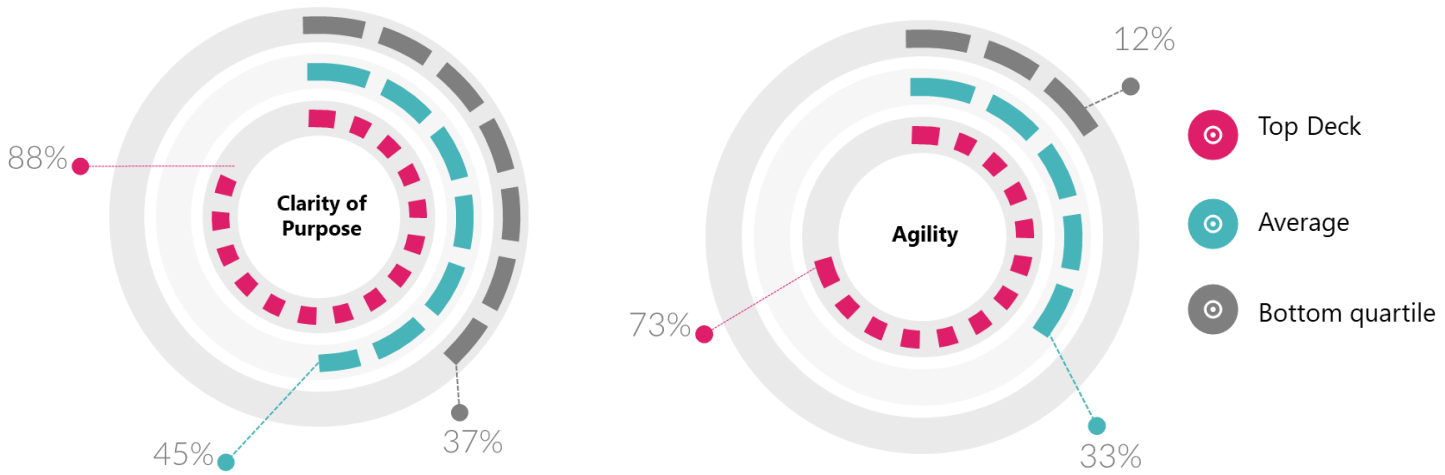
- Audit where you are now*
- Engage leaders on where you are and jointly realign your future L&D strategy (all experiences need to drive growth, transformation, productivity and profitability)
- Invest in strategic and future-focused L&D (see Figure 11 for a great start to 7 key priorities)

*Take the Towards Maturity Benchmark for free now! <https://towardsmaturity.org/benchmark/>

²¹ <https://towardsmaturity.org/model/>

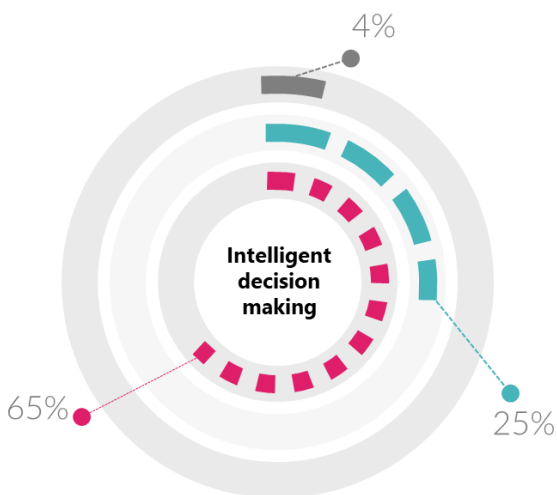
²² See our annual benchmark report *The Transformation Curve* for a detailed explanation of the stages (<https://towardsmaturity.org/2018/01/31/transformation/>)

Figure 12 Summary of the key tactics






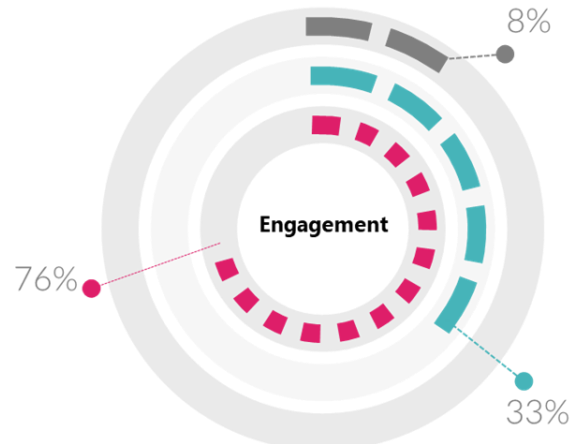
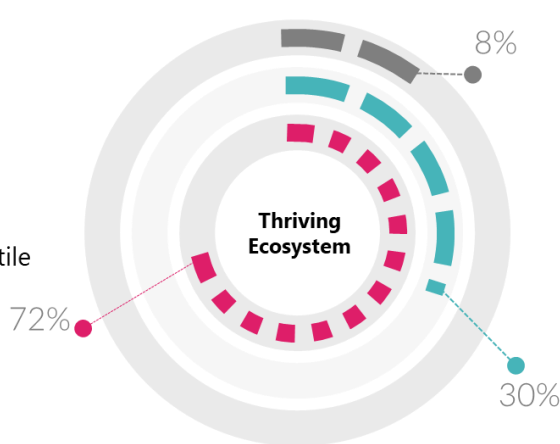
- **91%** of L&D say business leaders recognise that their learning interventions are aligned with the overall business plan (43% average, 11% bottom quartile)
- **88%** the objectives and aims of learning are discussed with individuals before they start learning (38%, 13%)

- **85%** of L&D believe staff know how work together to solve problems (vs 43% average, 13% bottom quartile)
- **71%** of L&D say that staff work together to productively connect and share knowledge (22%, 5%)



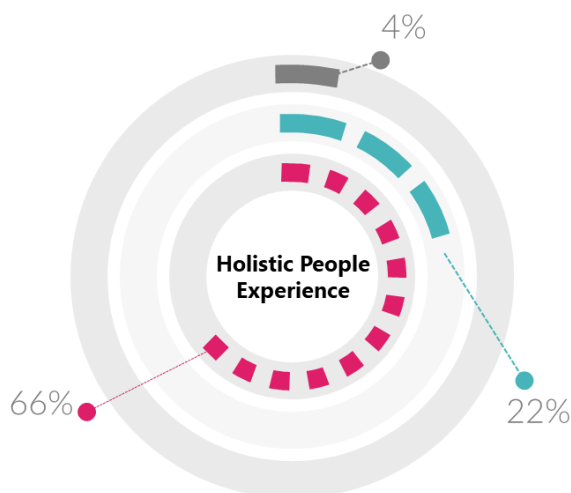
- **50%** of L&D use learning analytics to improve the service they deliver (20% average, 5% bottom quartile)
- **52%** benchmark our learning strategy and practices against other companies in our industry (18% average, 2% bottom quartile)

-  Top Deck
-  Average
-  Bottom quartile



- **65%** of L&D say that their managers provide active support in the application of learning in the workflow (16% average, 1% bottom quartile)
- **55%** of L&D regularly communicate performance impacts to line managers and supervisors (23%, 4%)

- **76%** of L&D are proactive in understanding how their people currently learn what they need for their job (28% average, 1% bottom quartile)
- **88%** of L&D ensure there is a communication plan in place for all key stakeholders (35%, 6%)



- **76%** of L&D use defined performance support practices to support learning transfer after formal learning (18% average, 1% bottom quartile)
- **50%** of organisations encourages (and provide time for) reflection (14%, 2%)

12 steps to success

Setting Goals

- Align all learning goals with the organisation's goals
- Set leaders and managers up for success by supporting them to drive performance and productivity through every team member
- Consistently measure and communicate the success or actions required to deliver against the goals

Getting there smarter

- Audit what data and capability you currently have and how you use it
- Create a smart plan to connect fresh data that aligns with your performance and productivity goals
- Develop new capabilities for analysing and communicating great data stories (e.g. move to an evidence-led approach to decision-making)

Building Ownership

- Proactively understand how your leaders and learners learn to increase performance and productivity (e.g. how does leveraging technology aid closing the gaps)
- Set up governance alongside your business/HR cycle (e.g. a wider consultation group)
- Continuously engage leaders and learners through a targeted and planned rhythm and routine and track your engagement results

Empowering People

- Revolutionise your approach to L&D / Invest in strategic L&D and move to agile and lean performance-related methodologies (see figure 11 / page 30)
- Involve leaders and managers in the L&D strategy and design
- Release people to learn, empowering them with the key resources and support required to increase performance and productivity (e.g. set-up communities of practice and collaborative connections to learn)

See pages 32 – 33 for a summary tactics related to the above

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"Completing the Learning Landscape gave us a much clearer view on our learners, the insights gathered enabled us to accelerate our strategy and deliver desired results around 18 months early"

Group VP, L&D
Brambles

"Towards Maturity's events deliver high value insight with data to back it up. They always spark new ideas or bring a different perspective on existing plans. Definitely worth making time for."

Senior L&D Manager
LV=

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