



# Rethinking Learning as a Strategic Investment

*Why Strategic Capability Building is the Growth  
Driver You Can't Afford to Ignore*



# We're not short on disruption. We're short on learning agility.

AI, automation, ESG pressures, global economies, shifting workforce demographics - every business leader today is navigating complexity at speed. And while digital transformation and change projects dominate the boardroom agenda, the reality is clear: strategies don't fail for lack of ambition or technology. They fail because organisations don't have the capabilities to execute them.

It's time to shift the conversation. Learning is not a cost. It's not an HR initiative. It's not a one-off training event. Learning - when strategically embedded - is a growth driver. A force multiplier. A powerful and highly valuable competitive advantage.

Organisations that recognise this are not only outperforming their peers; they're future-proofing themselves against whatever comes next.

*"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." - Alvin Toffler*

## People Development and Learning

94%

Of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development

30%

Greater productivity is reported by organisations with effective learning programmes

72%

Of high-performing organisations use learning to help achieve their business goals

3x

More likely to say their company has exceeded financial targets when learning is connected to strategic goals

# The Hidden Barrier to Strategy Execution

According to McKinsey, 70% of transformation initiatives fail - but why is that?

The most cited barrier is insufficient capability and cultural readiness. Leaders are investing in bold strategies - AI integration, sustainability targets, customer-centric models - but capability gaps are slowing execution. The strategy is solid. The systems are in place. But the people? They're just not equipped.

**This isn't just a talent issue. It's a learning issue. One that sits at the heart of execution, agility, and resilience.**

*“Organisations with strong learning cultures are 92% more likely to develop novel products and processes.”*  
- Deloitte Human Capital Trends

## Learning - Cost or Investment?

Cost	Investment
Reactive, ad hoc	Proactive, structured
One-time events	Continuous development
Minimal business impact	Tied to business outcomes
Viewed as an expense	Driver of performance & growth
You need proactive, capability-building learning that's aligned to strategy	

# Why is Learning Still Seen as a Cost?

Because it's often disconnected from strategic decisions and outcomes and lacks clear, measurable impact.

The result is that learning often remains a tactical afterthought:

- ❖ **Legacy mindsets:** Learning is viewed as a compliance tool or onboarding necessity - not as a driver of strategic execution.
- ❖ **Disconnection from performance:** Many learning programmes are not linked to business KPIs or measurable outcomes.
- ❖ **Siloed responsibility:** Learning sits in HR or L&D, away from where business decisions are discussed and made.
- ❖ **Lack of agility:** Traditional training methods are too slow and rigid to meet fast-changing business needs.
- ❖ **Weak measurement:** Without clear ROI data, learning is seen as a sunk cost rather than a growth driver.

*“Only 8% of L&D leaders measure the business impact of learning effectively.” - LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report*

## Effective Learning's Contribution to the Bottom Line



15%

Higher rates of employee engagement in skill-building companies



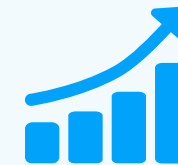
52%

Of CEOs say that retraining is the best way to close skills gaps



24%

Increase in productivity when training is integrated with workflows



37%

Increase in overall productivity

# Moving From Cost Centre to Competitive Advantage

The business case for learning is not just theoretical - it's proven.

- ❖ IBM found that every \$1 spent on training delivers \$30 in productivity gains.
- ❖ Bersin by Deloitte shows that high-impact learning organisations are 37% more likely to have greater employee productivity.
- ❖ LinkedIn Learning reports that companies where learning is aligned to business goals are 58% more prepared for future demands.

Learning drives real commercial outcomes:

- ❖ Revenue per employee increases when capabilities are upgraded.
- ❖ Attrition falls as employees feel more invested in and prepared for future growth and opportunities.
- ❖ Innovation rates rise as cross-functional skills are built.
- ❖ Risk is reduced through stronger compliance, ESG understanding, and operational consistency.

## People Development as a Strategic Enabler



66%

Of L&D pros say learning is a key part of their organisation's growth



35%

Is the average increase in income per employee in companies with comprehensive training programmes



74%

Of Fortune 100 companies align their training efforts with business strategy

# What Leading Organisations Are Doing Differently Around Learning

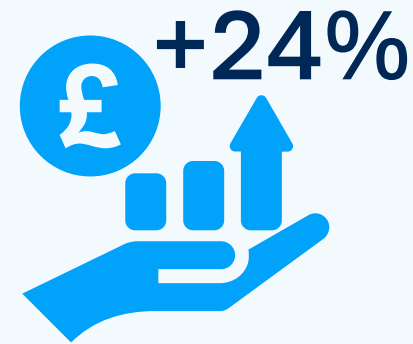
High-performing businesses treat learning not as an HR task, but as a business priority. Here's how:

- ❖ Unilever integrated learning into its sustainable business model. Their learning platform promotes self-directed learning aligned with ESG and innovation goals.
- ❖ Microsoft promotes a “growth mindset” across the organisation - embedding learning into team routines and manager KPIs.
- ❖ EY and Nestlé have built internal academies that tie learning outcomes directly to strategic business capabilities and succession planning.

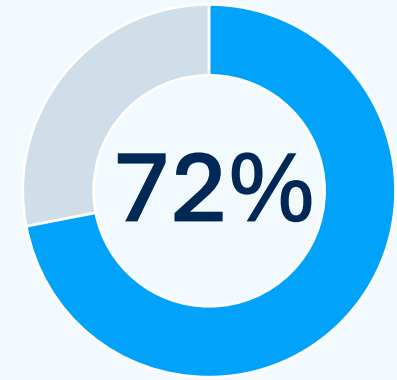
## Common threads include:

- ❖ Clear senior leader sponsorship
- ❖ Cross-functional accountability for learning outcomes
- ❖ Embedded feedback loops for relevance and agility
- ❖ Use of data to drive iteration and alignment

## On Financial Performance



Greater profitability for companies that make a significant investment in employee learning



Of high-performing companies report that L&D has a positive impact on financial outcomes

Source: LinkedIn Learning, 2023

*“The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be your only sustainable competitive advantage.” - Arie de Geus, Shell*

# Strategic Shifts for Practical Impact

For those SME organisations who want to shift from ad hoc training to strategic learning, it doesn't require massive budgets. It requires intentionality and alignment. Here's how:

## Key Steps:

### 1. Start with Strategy

- ❖ Map your top 3–5 business goals. Then ask: what skills, behaviours, and capabilities will get us there?

### 2. Align KPIs

- ❖ Move beyond attendance and satisfaction. Track learning impact on key performance metrics, productivity, time-to-competency, and retention.

### 3. Embed Ownership

- ❖ Learning shouldn't sit solely with HR. Engage line managers and department heads to co-own development plans.

### 4. Adopt Agile Methods

- ❖ Use digital learning, peer-to-peer mentoring, job aids, micro-content, and real-time coaching to drive on-the-job application.

### 5. Measure What Matters

- ❖ Use simple tools (e.g., pre/post capability assessments, business metrics correlation, manager feedback) to quantify progress.

## Learning is now a Strategic Priority



# Action Plan Steps:

Try this tested roadmap for embedding learning as a strategic driver - especially for growing SMEs.



## First 90 Days

### Getting Strategic:

Understand your starting point and where you are looking to get to - and don't be too ambitious to start:

- ☐ Audit existing learning activity as well as current spend
- ☐ Map business goals to capability gaps
- ☐ Identify champions in managers and team leaders
- ☐ Create a learning strategy that's aligned to appropriate KPIs



## Day 90 - 180

### Pilot and Report:

Run initiatives, get managers and leaders involved, and start measuring and reporting:

- ☐ Pilot a small-scale initiative linked to business outcomes (e.g., sales enablement, leadership development)
- ☐ Train managers (and leaders) to support informal learning
- ☐ Report on simple metrics e.g., time-to-competence, as well as performance deltas (used to track and analyse changes in performance over time)



## Day 180 - 365

### Scale, measure and showcase:

Be ready to scale what is working, align learning and financial measures, and celebrate success:

- ☐ Scale what works: embed learning activities and resources into individual and team workflows
- ☐ Link learning data to financial metrics (e.g., revenue per head, churn, customer experience, sales, quality)
- ☐ Showcase success stories to reinforce the learning culture and set a budget for further strategic learning initiatives

# From Insight to Action:

## Introducing the Capability to Impact Framework™

If this eBook has resonated with you, you're not alone. Across sectors, leaders are realising that learning is no longer a support function - it's a strategic enabler. But knowing that change is needed is only the first step. The real challenge is turning insight into action, and action into measurable impact.

That's why we created the Capability to Impact Framework™ - a practical, business-aligned model designed to help SME organisations close the gap between people development and performance outcomes. It brings clarity, structure, and momentum to learning strategy by aligning capability-building with your top business priorities.

This framework provides the tools, diagnostics, and structure to make learning visible, measurable, and fully embedded in the rhythm of your organisation. Whether you're just starting out or looking to optimise what's already in place, it offers a step-by-step path to making learning a true growth driver.

If you're ready to move beyond one-off training and start building a high-impact learning culture, we'd love to support you.

**Get in touch to explore how the Capability to Impact Framework™ can be tailored to your business.**

## The Capability to Impact Framework™



### Strategic Alignment

Ensure learning initiatives support strategic goals



### Capability Mapping

Identify key competencies needed for success



### Learning Ecosystem Design

Develop integrated, relevant learning solutions



### Measurement & Value

Track outcomes and demonstrate impact



### Embedding & Scaling

Embed into culture & scale across the organisation

# Ready to Make Learning Your Growth Driver?

Learning is no longer a luxury. It's no longer just a tick-box exercise. It's a fundamental part of your business strategy. It's your people development engine for resilience, reinvention, and results.

The businesses that will thrive tomorrow are already investing in learning today - not as a line item, but as a growth driver.

**The question is no longer “can we afford to?” - It’s “can we afford not to?”**

Get in touch today:

✉ [info@elearningplus.co.uk](mailto:info@elearningplus.co.uk)

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