



Applying Neuroscience Principles to Learning Content Strategy, Development, & Delivery

By Lighthouse Research

It's Time for Content Strategy

Learning leaders, listen up.

For far too long you've operated without a learning strategy in place.

According to research from Bersin by Deloitte¹, high-performing learning organizations are 92% more likely to innovate across a variety of business areas, but that doesn't happen without a cohesive strategy guiding our actions. We need to have that strategy in place to ensure that content is not only created to align with business objectives, but also that our learning content itself is **high-impact** and **relevant** to the needs of the modern learner.

All too often businesses are churning out content that is ad hoc, misaligned, and uninteresting. This isn't an indictment—it's a challenge. A challenge to focus efforts, create compelling content, and deliver learning experiences that achieve the intended business results.

One of the aspects of learning that has become more prevalent in recent years is the exploration of neuroscience as a contributor to learning success². Understanding **how** people learn is almost as important as deciding what they should learn. For instance, do you know if your content meets the threshold necessary for it to capture a learner's limited attention span? What about memory—are you aware of the amount of information that is lost due to simple forgetfulness?

In this eBook, we're going to explore these topics and others as a way to start building a business case for better content strategy, management, and execution practices. Our goal is to help you as an L&D leader to drive business value and impact, not just respond to content demands whenever they may arise. In addition to an exploration of neuroscience principles, we provide a simple assessment to help you understand not only where you stand today, but how to get where you need to be in the future.



¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/HumanCapital/gx-cons-hc-learning-solutions-placemat.pdf>

² <http://www.brainrules.net/about-brain-rules>

It's Time for Content Strategy

These are three of the basic principles of neuroscience that have high relevance for learning professionals:

- **Attention**
- **Memory**
- **Exploration**

In addition, each of these principles will be connected to specific segments of learning content strategy in order to demonstrate their practical application for learning professionals. Those segments, or pillars, are listed below:

- **Content Alignment**
- **Structure**
- **User Experience**
- **Technology**
- **Process**
- **Governance**

Taken as a whole, this set of pillars supports an enterprise-wide content strategy that delivers results, is strategically aligned, and meets the needs of the modern learner.



Attention

Neuroscience fact: People don't pay attention to things that are boring.

Practical impact: Your learning content needs to at least meet the minimum threshold of “not boring,” but we should all aspire to create and deliver content experiences that truly grab attention and drive desired behaviors. The University of California³ has found that the typical worker only gets 11 minutes of work in between interruptions, which means learning content should balance being short and consumable while still being relevant and interesting.

Advice: Make sure that the “why” behind your content is apparent. All too often we take for granted that learners will understand why we're sharing with them, but that link may be tenuous at best. In addition, it's critical to go beyond a standard eLearning course or lecture, focusing on learning experiences that encourage interaction, application of skills, and better outcomes for learners.

An ad hoc approach can't deliver the outcomes or the content that engages learners—businesses need a content strategy in place to properly identify and target the opportunities to help capture learner attention.

Questions to ask:

1. Is my learning content purely made up of eLearning or instructor-led courses? If so, how are they structured so they meet the needs of the modern learner that wants to learn anytime and anywhere she chooses?
2. Is my content engaging? What evidence supports this? Do learners interact with the content, share it, or have the opportunity to dive deeper, or is it all a one-way information transfer?
3. To what degree is my content mobile accessible? Is the mobile experience a positive one for learner consumption?
4. To take a step back, why are we even creating this content? What value are we hoping to deliver? Is that value clear to the learner population?

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/opinion/sunday/a-focus-on-distraction.html?mcubz=0>

Why Attention Matters in Content Strategy

USER EXPERIENCE

How your content is presented can either greatly enhance or greatly detract from the ultimate experience it creates for learners. Understanding the unique paths learners take and how to leverage them when planning out your content development, deployment, and management will drive the most attention to the places it is most required.

TECHNOLOGY

The technologies you leverage in your content development and deployment can enhance the attention of your learners. Marketing research⁴ shows that individuals that see messages in more relevant terms are more likely to consume products, and there's no reason to think this doesn't also apply to learning content consumption. By leveraging multiple delivery technologies, you can reach learners in ways that align with their preferences, whether video, mobile, or traditional courses.

GOVERNANCE

Planning ahead allows you to plan for the desired outcomes of your learning content. Governance plays a role in this by helping to determine how to strategically garner the right attention and how to measure the results and outcomes of learning. Additionally, governance helps to ensure that learning assets are refreshed as appropriate to remain relevant and valuable for learners.

⁴ <http://www.journalofadvertisingresearch.com/content/55/3/307>

Memory

Neuroscience fact: People forget most of what they are taught.

Practical impact: If you knew that 50-90% your learning content budget was being wasted, how would you change your approach? How would you reinforce and revive key concepts so that they remain fresh for learners? One experiment⁵ on student memory showed that they only retained about 10% of content after a three-day period.

Advice: Learning is about multiple touchpoints, not a single data download, especially if we're trying to drive behaviors. Create content, but also look for ways to repurpose smaller pieces, add in assessments or other interactive elements, and continuously keep your concepts top of mind so learners can move from understanding to application, cementing the learning.

An overarching content strategy can help to frame out how to capture not only the initial learning experience, but how to also tie in opportunities to boost key learning objectives over a period of time.

Questions to ask:

1. How many times are key learning concepts shared with learners? Once? Twice?
2. At what time intervals are learning concepts shared with learners, if at all?
3. How easy is it to find relevant modules of learning content?
4. What is the impact on your business if learners are forgetting half of what they are taught? How does it affect customer service, sales, or performance?

3 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/opinion/sunday/a-focus-on-distraction.html?mcubz=0>

Why Memory Matters in Content Strategy

USER EXPERIENCE

Creating a memorable experience is the key to learning success. If learners fail to remember the content they consume, it was a wasted investment. Therefore, the user experience is critical. Engaging learners, giving them interactive opportunities, and driving home key points will generate not only more memorable training, but better outcomes as well.

STRUCTURE

When learning is structured properly, it's easier to remember. Just throwing together a curriculum without giving any thought to what will drive the greatest learner retention follows the old adage: failing to plan is planning to fail. By incorporating several touch points into an ongoing plan to keep key concepts top of mind, leaders can create more memorable learning experiences that deliver results.

CONTENT ALIGNMENT

It all comes back to purpose. Do your learners know the purpose of the content you're sharing with them? While the content in itself may be valuable, helping to connect those assets with the greater purpose and value of the content will help to add weight and credibility from the learner perspective. Focus on that bigger picture and learners will more readily connect with and recall the content when the time comes.

Exploration

Neuroscience fact: Humans are natural explorers.

Practical impact: Our workforces are self-developing, given the right motivations and environment. Gallup's research says that nearly 90% of Millennials crave development opportunities in the workplace. This means learning leaders can leverage and nurture this innate desire to grow and develop.

Advice: Give people opportunities to consume content in a variety of formats and channels, from contextual performance support to big picture thinking on strategy. The best content comes back to practical application, giving learners the opportunity to draw direct parallels between the content and the workplace. Additionally, informal experiences, collaborative interactions, and mobile learning all offer opportunities to leverage other channels for exploration.

With a content strategy in place L&D leaders can ensure that each of these types of learning paths is available with adequate content to support any and all options that learners can pursue.

Questions to ask:

1. Consider the fact that your workforce actually wants to learn and grow. How does that fact change your approach to content development and management?
2. What opportunities do you currently offer for learners to explore topics and channels of interest?
3. How could a learning content strategy deliver value in this area by providing more structure, guiding learners toward preferred paths of consumption?

⁶ <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/193274/millennials-jobs-development-opportunities.aspx>

Why Exploration Matters in Content Strategy

STRUCTURE

Content searchability, or the ability for users to find and connect with the content that they need, is critical to this concept of exploration. Instead of searching and failing to connect with meaningful, valuable content, employers with good organizational structure behind their content can serve up the right piece of learning content at the right time, continuing to add value to the learning experience.

TECHNOLOGY

Every learner population has preferences for types of content to consume. For instance, if the employer has a variety of young, inexperienced workers on staff, short videos may be best for engagement and learning transfer. Or, if the audience is made up of more senior professionals, allowing them to explore expert directories and connect with user-generated content might be more valuable. Either way, using varying technologies allows employers to meet those exploration needs in a tailored way.

GOVERNANCE

What do learners do when they find stale, outdated, or irrelevant content? They move on, and the learning opportunity is gone. Governance as a part of content strategy allows employers to maintain a schedule for content refreshing, ensuring that the available resources are always up-to-date. As your learners embrace the natural exploration instinct, they are rewarded with high-quality, relevant content that helps them to perform better.

Quick Assessment: Content Strategy Maturity

While the conversation thus far has delved deep into numerous theoretical aspects of how the brain works, the goal of this resource is to be highly practical. With that in mind, the following assessment provides a quick look into the maturity of your learning content strategy.

For instance, is your learning content ready to impact employee performance from day one? What about different types of learners—can you meet their needs with what you're producing today? This assessment will give you a chance to rate your own approach and will give you actionable ideas based on your score.

Questions to ask:

1. What statement best describes your current situation with regard to learning content?
 - a. We create content as it is requested and there is little to no filter or governance on requests coming in to our team.
 - b. We have some governance in place to help ensure the right content is developed as it is requested, but there are special cases where we bend the rules.
 - c. We have strategically aligned our content strategy with our business strategy and it drives our approach to content development and management.
2. What statement best describes your content's applicability to the modern learner?
 - a. We are disorganized with our learning content and aren't really sure how to meet the needs of the modern learner.
 - b. We have plenty of eLearning and instructor-led training that make up the bulk of our learning content. Our content is generally appealing but doesn't really engage learners deeply.
 - c. We have supplemented our main eLearning and instructor-led training with other offerings, such as mobile content, social sharing, and performance support. Content reflects our organization's mission, brand, and values.



Questions to ask:

3. What statement best describes your content's fit to the employee lifecycle?

- a. We have heavy focus on onboarding content, but we don't put as many resources behind content supporting other touch points in the employee lifecycle.
- b. We have content that not only supports a strong onboarding process, but also ongoing needs as employees progress through the organization at key checkpoints (e.g. new manager transition training).
- c. We have content that supports employees at each stage of the lifecycle, giving them full coverage and confidence that there is highly relevant training on hand at all times to support growth and development. There are no gaps in our content when it comes to the various stages of the employee lifecycle.

4. How does your organization evaluate the effectiveness of learning content within the context of an overarching strategy?

- a. We mainly use anecdotal evidence or general feelings of satisfaction.
- b. We mainly use satisfaction surveys and/or completion reports from our learning management system for tracking purposes
- c. We mainly rely on observations of behavioral changes or look for measurable business results to validate that learning took place and/or behaviors changed

This is just a quick assessment, but it's also a good indicator of the maturity of an organization's content development processes. Let's see how you fared:

Mostly A's:

Your organization is at the low end of the maturity curve, but there is room for improvement. Opportunities include connecting business strategy to content development so there are fewer ad hoc projects and creating and offering content that meets the learner wherever the content may be needed (mobile, social, etc.)

Be willing to ask questions about the quality of learning content versus the quantity. Are you creating impactful resources, or are you just churning out content to meet demand?

Mostly B's:

Your organization has adopted some good practices for content development and management, but there's still an element of strategy missing. Opportunities include moving from minimal governance to a more structured approach and getting learning into the hands of users when and how they need to consume it for maximum effectiveness.

Additionally, during initial planning it's important to think through not only the purpose, but also the measurable outcomes driven by consumption of the content. How can you track performance impact?

Mostly C's:

Congratulations! Your organization is at the front end of learning content maturity practices. While you have mastered some areas, there are still opportunities to benchmark against other firms, improve measurement of content effectiveness, and deliver consistently valuable content in a variety of media and contexts.

Within your planning process, continue to focus on high level business outcomes as a way to validate your approach. Are you driving metrics that matter?

Regardless of your score, the thing to remember is that there's always room to improve. Even small steps can take your learning from "check-the-box" quality content to highly engaging learning experiences that encourage powerful behavioral change.

Conclusion

In each of these examples, we have pointed toward key elements of how the brain naturally operates.

- **Content needs to be interesting and engaging, or it's a waste of resources**
- **Content must be strategically repetitive in order to be retained**
- **Content should be explorable, giving learners a chance to chart their own path**

By creating a learning content ecosystem that meets these types of needs, learning leaders can not only deliver more value to the workforce, but higher value to the business as well—a worthy aspiration for all.

Additionally, the short assessment helps to ensure that you are taking a practical approach to incorporating these elements into your strategic planning. Why?

Because learning is more than just content production and delivery—it is a strategic performance enhancement tool.

While many learning leaders would say that strategy or engagement is a challenge, in reality the biggest challenge for learning leaders today is changing the perception of the rest of the organization. Learning isn't just about creating more content or training delivery--it's about delivering targeted business results through key behaviors and knowledge sharing.

The best way to ensure those kinds of results in your business is to use a proven approach to learning content strategy. The six elements covered in this eBook include content alignment, structure, user experience, technology, process, and governance. These items form the core of a high-performance learning content strategy as defined by Tribridge, the trusted partner for learning leaders around the globe.

It's time to step up your game, take content strategy seriously, and deliver the experiences your learners crave.

For more information about how to make this leap, check out [here](#).





About Us

Tribridge's HCM services deliver innovation that aligns talent resources with business objectives. Our certified experts enhance leading talent management platforms to put clients comfortably in command of their investment and improve employee engagement. We help organizations enrich their content strategy and deliver modern, engaging content to their learners. Our team of experts have also developed ContentSphere, our own learner-centric solution that puts learners in control, providing a single place to access a wealth of content, from multiple sources, anywhere they need it.



About Us

Lighthouse Research & Advisory is a modern analyst firm dedicated to setting the standard for excellence in talent, learning, and HR. By providing compelling research and actionable insights for business leaders, our team's mission is to navigate the rapidly changing field of human capital management to support today's talent and learning functions. From establishing frameworks and defining competitive practices to illuminating the ROI of the employee experience, our goal is to chart a new course for talent.

Ben Eubanks is the Principal Analyst at Lighthouse, providing insights for today's talent leaders and vendor partners. Prior to joining Lighthouse, Ben worked as a research analyst for Brandon Hall Group, focusing on learning, talent acquisition, and talent management. During his tenure, he published more than 100 pieces of research and provided advisory services to executives from some of the largest and most respected organizations in the world.

He also has hands-on experience working as an HR executive, leading both strategic and tactical talent practices. Ben is the host of We're Only Human, a podcast focused on the intersection of people, technology, and the workplace. In addition, he runs upstartHR.com, a website serving HR leaders that has reached more than 750,000 readers since its inception.