

Learning in a Tough Economy—Better, Faster, with Less

No one can predict what will happen next month or next year but economic conditions will eventually improve, and when they do the business landscape may be changed indelibly as a result. Organizations that find ways to be more efficient in all their business operations will prevail. For the learning function, this might mean a greater emphasis in the following areas: ensuring training is tied to business objectives, measuring learning initiative outcomes, using non-traditional delivery mechanisms, and looking for efficiencies in traditional methods.

Executives and workplace learning professionals should be asking the question, “What can I do that will cost less, be innovative, and have a real impact on performance and productivity?” states Jeanne Meister, author of several workplace learning books. The current economy is opening up opportunities for blended learning, eLearning, collaboration, mobile learning and informal learning. How will your learning function adapt to these realities? Focus on what matters—programs that increase efficiency, are tied to business objectives, are measurable, and increase the company’s competitive advantage. Although not a comprehensive list, here are ten suggestions to consider helping your learning function become better and faster with fewer resources.



1. Repurpose your widely used training programs to an eLearning platform. Potential hard savings exist in travel, facilitator cost, and room and paper expenses. Productivity gains will be recognized as learners fit training into their schedule at their own learning pace.
2. Consider virtual delivery platforms to allow for human interaction during learning without the expense of travel or leaving one’s desk.
3. Use technology-based games and simulations to provide new ways of learning. Games force people into a new way of thinking and can be perfect training on problem solving scenarios.
4. Establish the infrastructure and tools for communities of practice, wikis and blogs. Foster informal learning that takes advantage of what is already in place, the expertise in your company.
5. Use podcasts for short, just in time learning. Use the company email to push necessary learning updates inexpensively to employees.
6. Increase webinar use. A great way to capture knowledge is by recording training sessions and making them available just in time. This solution is particularly efficient for companies that do not have a learning management system.
7. Offer more 24/7 learning opportunities through your company intranet. Have the information technology department help by creating a learning portal where recorded webinars, podcasts, wikis, and blogs can be accessed.
8. Continue providing leadership development programs focused on financial and performance goals to your high-potential employees. The company’s competitive advantage lies at least in part in the experience and knowledge of the employees.
9. Emphasize individual responsibility for learning by providing an infrastructure and reward system for those who participate. Speak with the company executives about the advantages of a learning culture. The change starts at the top with the words and actions of the executive team.

10. Keep company executives informed of learning outcomes. Show the positive influence on performance and the measurable results. Provide the executive team with the information to make informed decisions when it comes to future learning initiatives. The

executive's job is to increase company profitability. Show how earning initiatives increase the bottom line and benefit the company. The company and everyone in it wins!

Savvy companies know that increasing learning during tight times is a good investment in the future. The savviest companies—those that use this time to create stronger internal organizations—will be poised to take advantage of all opportunities as the economy begins to turn around.