REVOLUTIONIZE
LEARNING &
DEVELOPMENT

Performance and
Innovation Strategy for
the Information Age

Clark N. Quinn

WILEY
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About the Author

Clark N. Quinn, Ph.D., is an advocate of the potential of technology to facilitate learning and performance. His work has been at the cutting edge in areas such as adaptive, mobile, and content systems. With a particular focus on learning, he has designed and developed innovative solutions for community agencies, schools, industry, and government. The author of Engaging Learning: Designing e-Learning Simulation Games; Designing mLearning: Tapping into the Mobile Revolution for Organizational Performance; and The Mobile Academy: mLearning for Higher Education, Clark has led the design of award-winning online content, educational computer games, and more.

Currently working through Quinovation as a principal in the Internet Time Alliance, and a charter member of Change Agents Worldwide, Clark provides strategic analysis of organizational learning and knowledge system design to Fortune 500 companies and government, not-for-profit, and education sectors. Clark previously led research and development as director of Cognitive Systems for Knowledge Universe Interactive Studio and held executive positions at Open Net
and Access CMC, two Australian initiatives in Internet-based multimedia and education.

A recognized scholar, Clark has an extensive publication record and invited presentations and keynotes at national and international conferences. He has held academic positions at the University of New South Wales, the University of Pittsburgh’s Learning Research and Development Center, and San Diego State University’s Center for Research in Mathematics and Science Education. Clark received his doctorate in applied cognitive science from the University of California, San Diego, after working for DesignWare, an early educational game software company. Clark was the first recipient of the eLearning Guild’s Guild Master award in 2012.
This book was written to answer the question: How does Learning & Development (L&D) move forward?

WHY

This book is written to pull together a number of disparate strands that have circulated about what L&D should be doing. The evidence is substantial that L&D is out of alignment with what is occurring in other areas. As calls for more openness and empowerment in organizations arise, the opportunities to leverage big data and analytics emerge, and new technology advances increase, L&D is still measuring efficiency, not impact, offering courses instead of assistance in the workflow, and not taking advantage of the power of social media.

This book has been written as a call to action—about the need, the means, and the path forward.

WHAT

This book has four main sections that tell the story of why and how to change.
The first section shows how the world is changing faster, and the evidence that, by and large, L&D is not doing what it can and should be doing—and what it is doing it is doing badly. That’s a strong claim, but the evidence is compelling. L&D is largely not taking responsibility for performance support or communities, either for employees or for themselves. And the metrics used by L&D are not the metrics that can evaluate the strategic impact on the organization.

The second section overviews the changes in understanding that have occurred and need to be accounted for. These include understanding of our minds, our organizations, and our technology. Our thinking has changed, our understanding of what makes organizations effective has changed, and our technology has advanced at a phenomenal rate.

The third section paints a picture of what it would look like if L&D were doing the job it could and should do. It starts with a revised focus, includes a self-assessment, and some reflections by leaders.

The fourth section is more practical, breaking down the steps and covering pragmatic issues, as well as looking forward.

Not

This book is not a final answer. There are answers in many of the component areas, but the integration is new, and a book is a limited endeavor. An emergent community that will be available from RevolutionizeLnD.com will address how the initial ideas presented here can be taken forward. This is a spark, not the whole fire.
This book is also not just about formal learning, nor going all the way to talent management. It is at an intermediary level that covers a strategic element of organizational success.

**HOW**

The book starts off with data documenting the state of the industry. In partnership with the American Society for Training and Development, data derived from practitioners paints a picture of an industry that is not practicing what it preaches.

The book surveys a number of relevant principles, citing popular books that document the changes that are occurring in the world and our understanding, indicating new elements that must be accounted for.

A framework is presented to guide thinking about the components that should be under the purview of L&D and to characterize the opportunities, including elements of culture, formal learning, performance focus, social learning, infrastructure, and metrics. That framework is systematically leveraged throughout the book.

A series of scenarios detail what the situation would look like for different stakeholders. A selection of case studies from rising or established stars details some practical attempts at moving in this direction. A rethink that details the new ways in which to address this issue is coupled with the thoughts of two pioneers in the field.

Finally, the elements are pulled together and laid out as steps forward. Considerations and paths to be taken in order to adapt these recommended principles to the workplace are covered.
All along the way, pointers are provided to relevant background information or approaches. Appendices include the Learning and Performance Institute’s Capability Map detailing the needed skills, the benchmark framework provided by Towards Maturity’s work on organizational progress, and ASTD’s own model of competency. Also included is a Manifesto for Change.

**USE**

This book is designed to make the whole case: why change is needed, what to consider, how to rethink, and recommended steps forward. If you already are sold on the need, you can skip the first section. If you are aware of the changes that need to be accommodated, you can skip the second section. Anyone who wants to move forward needs to read the final two sections, specifically Chapters 7, 9, and 10. I think most should also want to read Chapter 8.

This is a book to read and refer back to as you develop your own strategy.
Let me be blunt: the current state of the learning & development (L&D) industry is failing. Badly. Overall, L&D is only doing a fraction of what it could and should be doing, and the part that it is doing, it is doing poorly. The L&D industry has, by and large, been in denial and a willing participant in complacency. As a consequence, L&D is on a steady path to extinction. The perception of L&D’s value to the organization is largely one of irrelevance. Other parts of the organization are creating solutions for learning and performance problems by creating portals of self-generated resources, such as videos or their own social networks. Yet the potential is there, particularly in this emerging age of change, for L&D to be perhaps the most essential component of a business. This mismatch between potential and current status is, quite simply, disheartening.

Let me explain where I’m coming from. As an undergraduate, I became so excited about the potential for learning and
technology that I ended up designing my own major in what then was called “computer-based education.” That was a long time ago, but I continued (and continue) to be excited about the ways in which our amazing advances in technology can facilitate learning. As an optimist, I’m always looking for the upside.

So imagine my surprise, ten years ago, stepping away from more disconnected research pursuits to the cut and thrust of the commercial market, to find that the typical approach to organizational learning was not only uninspired, but was flat out wrong. I’d expected the corporate world to have the need and the resources to be doing the best possible. I came in full of excitement to talk about cutting-edge opportunities, but ended up disillusioned to find those discussions were flying over everybody’s heads.

A decade and more later, it’s no better. Some of the names have changed, the technology is flashier, but there is a decided lack of effort to draw upon an intellectual foundation for decisions. As an indicator, the expo halls at the average learning conference are not only pushing outdated models with little impact, but they’re the same outdated models. Worse, approaches are being presented as soundly based that are scientifically discredited or have been replaced by updated frameworks.

Consequently, the industry by and large is irrelevant. Let me get back to basics:

• The typical training event returns little for the resources invested. The notion that you can dump a bunch of knowledge into a person’s head in a short period of time is a delusion that doesn’t match the actual ways in which we learn.
What we train on is too often focused on the wrong things. By and large, static knowledge isn’t going to lead to any meaningful change in behavior.

How we train doesn’t match how we learn. We miss what’s known, both in the ways we engage and in the ways we practice.

How we have learners engage is often trivial as well. We may get them to interact with each other, or the content, but not both together.

We miss big opportunities to assist the organization that we could and should own. Formal learning is widely acknowledged as only a small component of what leads to success, and yet that is most of what we spend our effort on.

Finally, we frequently ignore opportunities to leverage technology that are literally in our hands. We don’t understand the real opportunities technology offers, are swayed by flavor-of-the-month, possess unrealistic expectations, and, consequently, abandon real value after predictable disappointments.

What is the outcome?

Folks who dread the words “training” and “learning.”

The use of gimmicks to maintain attention in the classroom.

eLearning that has people staying away in droves.

An industry that measures efficiency, but not effectiveness.

Let me be clear: I’m speaking from passion. I’m angry! The waste of resources that results is not only disappointing,
it’s shameful. People need help, there are people who should be helping, and help is being dissipated in meaningless activities. It’s a racket, and I’m calling it out.

Let me also say that I’m overlooking some good instances. There are companies with enlightened cultures, meaningful learning design, effective performance support, vibrant networks, and demonstrable contributions to the organization. Not all of the industry is in need of repair, but way too much is. Most, frankly. What you are doing in your organization is likely to be represented here in at least one way, perhaps more. Don’t think you can drop out at this point, because I’ll bet that there are situations in which you’re not optimized.

More importantly, I’m calling you to task. I want to show you what could be, detail a path to get there, and inspire you to start moving. So what can, and should, the world look like?

HARNESSING MAGIC

“If truly advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” —Arthur C. Clarke

If we were doing it right, what we would see is:

• Relevance deeply embedded
• Experiences, not events
• Learning distributed across work, space, and time
• A focus on performance, on “do”
• An elegant segue from novice, through practitioner, to expert

• Social learning as an integral component, not an afterthought

This is not a pipedream; this is doable. Now.

This is not about technology, but technology is the lever, the opening we have needed. Quite simply, we have magic, as Clarke suggests; we can bring anything anywhere we want. Technology capabilities are no longer the barriers; the limits are now between our ears.

If we have magic, the question then becomes, “What are we going to do with it?” Which is a great opportunity to get back to our real motivations. Before we ask “What are we doing,” we should be asking ourselves “What could we be doing?”

In 2009, SRI delivered a report to the U.S. Department of Education assessing elearning. The results of the report demonstrated (for the first time) that elearning was superior to face-to-face instruction. However, the report suggested “the studies in this meta-analysis do not demonstrate that online learning is superior as a medium”; instead, the likely reason was the chance to rethink the learning process, including elements such as “time spent, curriculum, and pedagogy” (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). We need to rethink design.

We have the opportunity to reinvent what we’re doing. To do that, we have to look very deeply at how learning works, and at what we’re trying to achieve. As we do so, we are going to see that many of the things we are doing are not consonant with how we learn and, in fact, are almost in opposition.
To start, we need a core focus. We need to look very closely, with fresh eyes, at what we want to achieve, and then work backward to how we get there.

**PERFORMANCE**

I suggest that our core goal is performance, and our role is performance augmentation. We seldom learn for intellectual self-gratification; instead we learn to be able to do new things or do them better. To do things we haven’t been able to do before. To do things that will help us achieve our goals. The focus of learning and development is to prepare people, but we need to focus on people *doing*, and work backward to how we prepare them.

This implies, by the way, that it’s also about finding ways not to have to put knowledge into people’s heads, and to put (or find) the answer “in the world.” Sometimes, in fact many times, what we should be doing is trying to avoid putting new knowledge and skills into their heads. It is typically very hard to get people to learn new things, and often it’s easier to get answers out of other people’s heads or to make answers available in the world.

Which also implies, very clearly, the need to be very explicit about what performance is needed and what is currently being observed. In addition, we need to look at the barriers to the behavior we want. We need to have very clear definitions of what needs to be done, tied to what the organization is trying to achieve.

We should be measuring our ability to impact organizational performance. Our metrics should be key goals of business units, whether it’s higher customer satisfaction, increased sales, decreased errors, or faster problem solving.
The good news is that this is doable. Some clear methods are available to meet these goals. There are processes, technologies, and mindsets that together can give a very clear roadmap forward. The opportunity is on the table to move from irrelevancy to strategic value. It is just that these approaches must be the mainstream, not the exception.

The bad news is that, while these approaches are straightforward, it will take effort and resources. We have to get our minds around how we really learn, discover what technology options we have in hand, rethink our processes from the performance focus, and work through the organizational implications. No one said it was easy, just that it is necessary.

**BOTTOM LINE**

- What we’re doing is not sufficient.
- (And we’re not doing well what we are doing.)
- A different focus is needed now.
- The elements are known.
- There are paths forward.

Yes, you do have to change. But you can, and when you do, the benefits will be manifest. So let’s get started.
THE PATH TO THE FUTURE OF LEARNING
IN ORGANIZATIONS

Co-published and sponsored by ASTD, Revolutionize Learning & Development examines the steps required to shift corporate learning onto a more meaningful trajectory. Taking a new approach means aligning more closely to how people really think, learn, and work. The shift to a focus on performance and innovation meets the challenges resulting from increasing change and a need for organizations to be more agile.

Written by the author of three books on organizational learning and performance, this book leverages technology advantages within the context of larger L&D objectives. It exposes the broken state of today’s corporate training and outlines a path forward for broadening the scope of impact on organizational success through new technologies such as mLearning and social media.

“This is a spark, not the whole fire,’ Clark Quinn states in the opening pages of this manifesto on the future of the L&D profession. I am grateful to Clark for his courage, insight, and willingness to write this important book and to challenge the profession to strive for the next level of impact it can achieve.”
—Tony Bingham, President and CEO, ASTD

“Clark has written the book I have been waiting for. He succinctly explains why current practices fail to deliver results and outlines the path forward. Just what the 21st century CLO needs to know.”
—Kevin Wheeler, Founder and President, Global Learning Resources

“I love this book. Clark Quinn says what needs to be said to L&D leaders—and he says it with the perfect blend of respect, frustration, irreverence, and hope. It’s time!”
—Marcia Conner, Executive Advisor, and best-selling author of The New Social Learning

“This book raises fundamental questions for us all. Everyone involved in workplace learning who wants to play a part in the future—or even to have a job—should read it.”
—Donald H Taylor, Chairman, Learning and Performance Institute

“Clark Quinn has succinctly and adeptly drawn together all the evidence to make an undeniable case for fundamental change within Learning & Development. After reading this book, you will be ready to join the revolution, and begin the process of shifting from a focus on learning to a focus on performance.”
—Jane Hart, Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies

“Work is learning and learning is the work. Clark Quinn gives a clear path forward for today’s L&D profession on the cusp of revolution or extinction.”
—Harold Jarche, International Speaker and Principal, Jarche Consulting

“In this book, Clark Quinn pulls no punches in addressing many of the factors that are handcuffing organizational learning, and provides tangible solutions learning professionals can implement to make things better.”
—David Kelly, Program Director, The eLearning Guild

Clark Quinn, author of Engaging Learning, Designing mLearning, and The Mobile Academy, is a well-known and respected contributor to the eLearning field. The first recipient of the eLearning Guild’s Guild Master award, he has spoken internationally and consults to Fortune 500 corporate, education, not-for-profit, and government sectors.

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