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As the business landscape has changed over the past few years, learning and development (L&D) has grown into a massive $370 billion industry. Companies are beginning to see the benefit of a well-functioning L&D program. Because L&D goes beyond the simplistic view of training programs that only teach employees the limited skills they need to perform their job, a good program builds employees that are more well-rounded and prepared for whatever obstacles that may be thrown at them.

As Agile practices make their way from software development teams to all aspects of business operations, these more flexible employees fit in perfectly with modern business practices. Let’s take a look at how a learning and development program can help your business become more Agile, and how Agile processes can benefit the program itself.
THE ROLE L&D PLAYS IN AN ORGANIZATION

As we’ve already mentioned, L&D goes beyond a simple training program. The role of an L&D program is to manage the development of the people who work in an organization in a way that drives that organization toward its goals. In a 2019 survey of employees, some of the top items they wanted from an L&D program included negotiation skills, help with having difficult conversations, and techniques for managing change. These types of skills aren’t necessarily about making an employee better in their specific job role, but rather about making them a better team member. With a good L&D program, the whole company benefits. Let’s now look at some of the top benefits that employers find when they implement a well-thought-out L&D system.

Develop Staff Skills

This is the obvious benefit and the only one that most people think of when they are considering implementing L&D programs. The goal of HR is right there in the name: to manage the human resources that make a business successful. Those resources, like any other, can become outdated and need updating. Thankfully, a good L&D program allows you to update the knowledge of your employees just as you would update the software on your computers. Doing so ensures that your team always has the skills they need to excel in your industry, no matter how quickly or how much that industry changes.

Attracting and Retaining Talent

Business owners aren’t the only ones who understand the importance of keeping up with the times. Employees also understand how much continuing education can benefit their career paths. Today’s employees are taking more control over their careers and keeping the good ones around means more than just a competitive salary. A company that offers employees the chance to gain the skills that they value is going to be a more attractive option that one that doesn’t. In this way, L&D programs can help you attract fresh talent and keep your competition from poaching your best staff members.
Improving Employee Relationships

Employee loyalty is important, but it’s not the only factor in what makes an employee-employer relationship successful. Providing employees with the training they need to excel in their careers doesn’t just satisfy their professional goals, it provides them with motivation to be the best at their job. As we’ve seen, many of the courses even give them tools to develop more meaningful and fruitful relationships with their coworkers.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR L&D PROGRAMS TO BE AGILE

The Agile philosophy comes from software development. Like many things, software development is made up of several different roles. Traditionally, these roles work independently of one another. This creates a bottleneck because often one team cannot do something until the other team has finished their part of the work. It further lengthens development time because the lack of a collaborative development environment means there’s more back and forth than there needs to be as the various teams try to meet the needs of one another.

Agile development has everyone working together in short development bursts. Because the project is broken up into smaller pieces, the teams involved can more readily adapt to change. Because they are all working at the same time, the project is completed faster. And because they are working collaboratively, they can provide input to one another about the best way to accomplish something that satisfies the needs of everyone.

L&D programs can benefit from an Agile philosophy in much the same way that software can. Rather than the entire course being planned out from start to finish and not exposed to actual use until it’s finished, a course developed with an Agile philosophy is developed in short sections which are implemented immediately.
HOW L&D PROGRAMS BENEFIT FROM BEING AGILE

With an Agile workflow, any problems with a course are caught early and the fixes for those problems can be used as progress as the course continues. Because of this bite-sized and continually refined approach to creating the course, the effectiveness of the course is improved concurrent with development, rather than at the end. Learners benefit in much the same way, with feedback of their performance coming quicker than it would in a more drawn out course. Let’s see how all this combines to make a more effective course.

Better Learning Outcomes

Breaking down a course into quicker, bite sized learning objectives is a big part of how the Agile philosophy manifests itself in L&D programs. This concept, called microlearning or eLearning, also happens to be a well-known way to increase the effectiveness of a course. Such a learning style keeps learners engaged, removing the fatigue that long learning sessions can have. It allows learners to focus on, and fully understand, a single learning objective at a time. Learners who have a hard time keeping up with traditional courses will especially benefit from bringing the Agile methodology to L&D.

More Flexibility

As the name of the methodology hints at, Agile philosophy is all about being able to adapt quickly to changes that occur. Software developers work in small batches during Agile development because when things change, long term plans can’t be ruined. The increased collaboration also aids in this process because everyone who may be affected by a given change is able to chime in on the development process as soon as the change happens. There are no mysteries about what other development units are doing. The same is true for creating learning resources. Instead of development, security, and testing teams, you have management, HR, and learners, but the core idea of everyone being on the same page at the same time ensures that the materials you use or create always represent the needs of the company at any given time.
Improved Feedback

The more immediate feedback is, the more valuable it becomes. When people give their thoughts on an issue, those thoughts are always going to be more detailed when they come shortly after the experience than after they’ve had time to forget tiny details. Immediate feedback is an integral part of the Agile philosophy. As a short burst of development is completed on a course, or the short bursts of learning that result from that are finished, Agile philosophy dictates that feedback is gathered to help determine the next step. For those creating the courses, this means learning material that adapts more quickly. For learners, this type of feedback helps them understand not only what they are getting right and wrong, but how they are engaging with the course.

CREATING AN AGILE L&D PROGRAM

One of the benefits we didn’t mention is an Agile L&D program will help create a more Agile overall business. But the reverse is also true: fostering an Agile culture will help lay the groundwork for an Agile L&D program. In this case, it isn’t a matter of one needing to come before the other. As a business makes a switch to a more company-wide Agile philosophy, making an Agile L&D platform a part of that will work symbiotically, helping to spread the philosophy to the rest of the company. That’s why an important first step is to consider the benefits of Agile workflows outside of just L&D and make them a part of your company culture. For L&D specifics, we’ve compiled a list of key factors that will aid you in making your program more Agile.

Adherence to Agile Principles

We’ve only given a broad overview of what Agile principles are, but it’s a whole philosophy that deserves greater detail than we can go into here. However, if you are going to create a truly Agile L&D platform, and adopt Agile principles in other areas of your business as well, you’ll need to have a firm understanding of exactly what it means for a business or a process to be Agile. We have a wide range of courses on everything from the basics of Agile methodology, to concrete implementation details for making various tools and processes more Agile.
Cooperation Between Management and HR

As we've said many times already, one of the cornerstones of Agile processes is cooperation at all times. It’s the goal of HR to find and cater to the needs of the workforce, which is why HR is often in charge of L&D programs. At the same time, management needs to constantly be re-evaluating the direction a company is going and its strategic goals at any given time. This is especially true in an Agile environment, where management is trying to adapt quickly to changes in the industry as they happen. It’s therefore important that both management and HR are on the same page in terms of what goals the L&D program should be meeting and what skills are important to balance the needs of the company with the needs of the workforce.

Effective Employee Assessment

The elearning strategy allows for highly customized learning paths for staff, and part of the Agile philosophy is being as efficient as possible. This makes elearning an excellent strategy for an Agile L&D program. The type of efficiency elearning can bring cannot be fully realized if the educational needs of each employee isn’t accurately assessed. It is then important to look at where you need your employees to be, where they are at currently, and use that information to inform your decisions about their learning and development path. As trends develop among groups of staff, this can even guide L&D strategy company-wide.

Proper Use of Technology

Technology has been one of the key enablers of Agile methodology across the business world. The same holds true for L&D programs. In fact, according to Statista, the use of technology in L&D doubled between the years of 2011 and 2017. Making use of various eLearning platforms, and online courses like those offered here at Cprime help make better use of employee time and company resources. They also make it easier to adapt to the specific needs of each employee, and to the changing needs of the business as a whole.
In-Depth Impact Analysis

Most business owners have already discovered the power of big data. In fact, businesses who use real-time data to drive decisions at a more granular level are already adopting part of what makes Agile methodology so great. Analytics empowers businesses to react to changes on the fly, and it can do the same for L&D. By keeping track of how your L&D program affects the productivity of your employees, how well they respond to the various educational initiatives, and how well the program is helping your business achieve its strategic goals, you’ll be able to adapt the program in real-time and maximize its benefit.

CONCLUSION

Over the past several years, rapidly advancing technology has changed many aspects of the way businesses operate. Businesses who are quick to adapt and those that are Agile, navigate these changes and excel at their goals. Building a culture that adapts quickly, and a staff with the skill sets to do so, is much easier when there’s a learning and development program in place to facilitate it. One that uses the same Agile methodology that the rest of the business needs to adopt in order to handle change. We’ve already mentioned our courses on Agile technologies and methodologies, but we offer many more courses that will help your business navigate change. Please feel free to contact us to learn more about how we can help your prepare your employees for the changing business world.
SOURCES

The Essential Components of a Successful L&D Strategy

What is an Agile Learning Culture & Why Do You Need One?

ADDITIONAL FREE RESOURCES

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Enroll in a 60-minute web seminar that discusses key management practices, research, and current trends.

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