

HOW CONTINUOUS LEARNING FUELS IMPROVEMENT

HEALTHCARE'S LEARNING IMPERATIVE

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Healthcare's workforces are in the midst of a transformation to keep pace with major shifts in how healthcare operates. From business offices to the front lines of care, people are being asked to work differently in healthcare.

Adjustment to value-based payment models, adoption of advanced analytics and a shift to a consumer-centric mindset are just a few of the trends challenging healthcare. Now, healthcare workers face ongoing pandemic management and COVID-19 protocols, and accelerated adoption of telehealth, home-based acute care and a shift to virtual work.

The long-term results of building a culture of learning can be a true differentiator for organizational performance, employee performance and employee engagement.

Mounting pressure to lower costs and improve quality and outcomes requires continuous improvement, and organizations need better performance from their technology, systems and people. Yet, for many organizations, their core asset — talent — remains a challenge. [Research from Huron](#) finds that acquiring talent is the chief

investment priority for healthcare payors. For providers, recruiting top talent has always been a priority made more difficult by industrywide workforce shortages.

To make up skills gaps and to improve overall performance, a lot of focus is being placed on developing employees, especially for skills related to technology adoption and use of data. While targeted skills development will be critical, to drive continual improvement, organizations will have to take a deeper look at their overall approach to training and learning.

By focusing on training, organizations can realize quick improvements in core business functions. More importantly perhaps, the long-term results of building a culture of learning can be a true differentiator for organizational performance, employee performance and employee engagement.

Learning Versus Training

Training is a point-in-time event to build a skill.

Outputs:
Quick wins and financial return.

Learning is about continually adapting workforces to handle the future.

Outputs:
Transformation, continuous improvement, innovation and future-forward thinking.

Learning is a forward-thinking approach that considers the challenges and needs of an organization both now and in the future and works backward from there to define new competencies and skills.

Continuous Learning Builds a Culture of Improvement

As organizations push forward-thinking agendas and broader transformation, they need an infrastructure that is prepared to support the *people* part of their plans. Learning not only builds the hard and soft skills to make plans work, it supports the stakeholder buy-in — alignment and accountability — that can make or break the adoption of new initiatives.

Building a learning culture starts with leadership teams. When the commitment to professional development starts at the top of an organization, it empowers employees with demanding roles to prioritize learning instead of viewing it as merely adding to their workloads. Leaders model learning by investing in their own continual development as well as by understanding the development opportunities of their employees and teams. In a learning culture, employees are encouraged to bring forward trainings, case studies or success stories from inside and outside their industry that could help address departmental issues or inefficiencies.

Still, staying on top of learning can be a challenge, especially for busy healthcare professionals. It takes a good deal of time to search for and find the right opportunities — time that healthcare professionals often do not have. On top of that, learning can also be expensive, depending on the type and amount of professional credits people are looking to earn. As budgets tighten, organizations will have to be smart about planning their learning programs with the right mix of results-driven courses and the right delivery methods.

Rethinking Learning

To develop sustainable and forward-thinking learning programs in healthcare, organizations have to rethink **how**, **why**, **when** and **where** we train people.

Why

Learning exists to drive results.

Learning for learning's sake is no longer enough. With the cost and performance pressures in the market today, learning must have a purpose and drive outcomes.

When and Where

Learning is continuous and happens everywhere.

Organizations tend to focus on transactional, one-off training such as onboarding. Learning should be a journey that occurs within structured trainings and in daily activities, such as one-on-one check-ins or team huddles.

Learning can't be optional; organizations have to create an environment where continuous learning is expected, rewarded and modeled from the top.

How

Agility and accessibility make learning possible and affordable.

Technology makes it possible to deliver customized learning to employees everywhere. However, how well organizations optimize their resources and measure outcomes will determine their success.

Organizations need clear strategies for how they will balance in-person and digital learning, via workshops, cohorts, peer-to-peer, etc.

Training as a Differentiator for Virtual Workforces

Healthcare workforces and operations are moving outside the four walls of the office. Organizations have to be prepared to support learning when large swaths of their employees are working in a virtual setting.

[Virtual workforces](#) need to be supported with training around the competencies, behaviors and expectations required for remote work. However, more than that, engaging employees with intentional, ongoing learning provides a critical connection point that workers will be missing when they operate outside the physical office space. As the virtual workforce continues to change talent recruitment and retention, the quality of an organization's learning program and its willingness to personalize an employee's professional development could be a differentiator in an increasingly competitive talent market.

Key Takeaways

Healthcare organizations need to develop employees and close talent gaps to continue improving at a rate that keeps pace with ever-increasing industry standards. Continuous learning can be key to supporting organizationwide improvement.

Think differently.

Training is a point-in-time event; learning is about continually adapting workforces to handle the future.

Plan differently.

Learning programs should be tied to clear results and drive organizational goals for improved performance such as lower costs and higher quality.

Act differently.

Learning and training can no longer be optional; from the top down, learning should be expected and modeled.



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