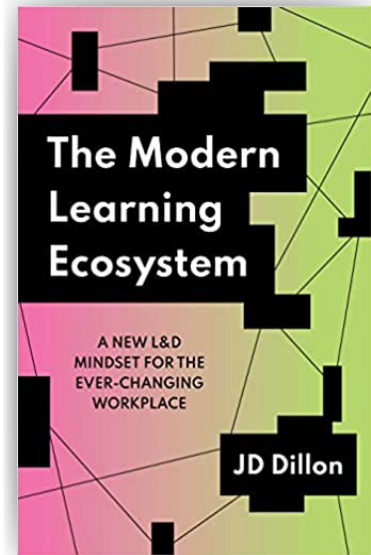


The Modern Learning Ecosystem

A New L&D Mindset for the Ever-Changing Workplace

JD Dillon



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Build a strong learning ecosystem based on open access, shared knowledge, and continuous adaptation.
- Integrate learning into workflow processes and systems. Recognize learning as an important achievement, equal to task completion.
- Build a learning environment in layers, starting with shared knowledge and capped by integrated training and microlearning.
- Use continuous measurement and data collection to monitor results. Match goals to shifts in skills, tech, or personnel and close critical gaps.

OVERVIEW

Today's business world is based on nonstop change and innovation. To thrive in uncertain and sometimes volatile conditions, business leaders need a learning ecosystem that can guide staff through the dynamic changes. In **The Modern Learning Ecosystem**, JD Dillon offers a step-by-step manual for ramping up learning and development (L&D) strategies. This book is for learning innovators, executives, and managers who want to overcome the disruptions associated with change.

IT'S TIME FOR A REMIX

Leaders don't need new ideas to boost L&D; they should simply consider existing fundamentals from a fresh perspective. Take a minute to revisit these three basic learning models:

1. *The 70-20-10 model.* Learning is the result of 70 percent experience, 20 percent personal interactions, and 10 percent formal programs.
2. *The continuous learning model.* Learning is based on the *four Es*: education, experience, exposure, and environment. Adapt organizational systems to create a learning culture.
3. *The five moments of need.* Learning occurs when something new is discovered, existing knowledge is increased, knowledge is correctly recalled and used, a problem is solved, or change is met with adaptation.

All three models can be used in combination with the *Modern Learning Ecosystem* (MLE) to meet changing conditions.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

As an L&D professional, you can apply the following six principles to address changes:

1. *Make learning essential.* Frontline workspaces are normally geared to maximize production, but should also integrate learning.
2. *Use the full ecosystem.* Use a full range of available systems, data, tools, and people to boost L&D. Make learning tools widely accessible.
3. *Apply data.* Analyze available data to pinpoint where learning increases performance and where future learning can be best applied.
4. *Provide personal experience.* Consider L&D solutions on a personal level. Each stakeholder or staff member requires a unique set of tools.
5. *Drive impact.* Learning is a measurable accomplishment and should be treated as such.
6. *Foster agility.* Put mechanisms and infrastructure in place to support changes.

Specific skills, such as those related to specific technologies and systems, fall in and out of fashion, while others based in management skills remain durable. Identify the skills gaps in your organization to identify where to best deploy L&D.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PLUMBING

Think of learning as water. In this analogy, an organization's L&D systems are the plumbing. If the pipes are clogged or leaking, water gets shorted or wasted. The good news is, unlike water, L&D serves a limited number of needs, such as:

- Providing training for core job abilities.
- Enabling the sharing of information.
- Providing practice and reinforcement.
- Delivering coaching and feedback.
- Helping staff to learn new skills.

The MLE framework fulfills these needs by building systems on six basic layers: shared knowledge, performance, reinforcement, coaching, pull training, and push training. Integrating these layers creates an infrastructure for proactive learning.

LAYER 1: SHARED KNOWLEDGE

The foundation for any successful L&D strategy is the ability to create a “just look it up” layer that’s easily accessible and contains all the tools that staff need to share and apply data and knowledge. Important elements of this layer include shared drives, Wikis, cloud repositories, company websites, and customer feedback platforms.

To implement a shared knowledge layer, follow these 11 points:

1. *Install a curator.* Start by appointing someone to oversee your L&D knowledge base. The curator’s only job is to ensure that knowledge gets to people who need it when they need it.
2. *Assess current practices.* Talk to staff and stakeholders. Determine where gaps in information flow can be closed.
3. *Evaluate existing technologies.* Check every application and device and make a list of which elements need to be upgraded or changed.
4. *Run experiments.* Try out new ideas on a small scale. See what fits or fails before scaling up.
5. *Engage partners.* Lean on HR, legal, IT, and all other sectors for support and strategy.
6. *Design experience.* Imagine how knowledge and resources will be received and used by specific audiences. Create a user experience for each audience.
7. *Close gaps.* Assign roles for maintenance, review, and administration of learning processes. Acquire new tools and technologies as needed to support sharing.
8. *Determine strategy.* Pinpoint the qualitative and quantitative data needed to implement sharing strategies. Be transparent with stakeholders about tracking and using data.
9. *Refine solutions.* Combine shared knowledge systems with L&D processes.
10. *Apply.* Screen initial shared knowledge practices with a small audience. Analyze results, and then adapt accordingly on a wider audience.
11. *Scale.* Base decisions on an organizational-level perspective.

When problems arise, your first step should be to access all available pertinent information and make it available to stakeholders so that solutions can be found quickly.

LAYER 2: PERFORMANCE

The second layer is the “I need help” part of the MLE framework. Performance support accelerates problem solving, cuts down on formal training needs, and boosts employee confidence.

Build a support layer with these seven steps:

1. *Assess workflow.* Identify points of access for hardware and software that enable on-demand support. Know how these points impact workflow.
2. *Identify struggle points.* Ask your workers where they struggle on the job and where they need guidance. Match performance tactics with these needs.
3. *Identify niche uses.* Determine if areas of specialized knowledge exist in the workflow chain. If so, build targeted solutions.

4. *Clarify retention requirements.* Be sure that support for employee performance stops short of replacing performance. Offer tools and guidance only when needed.
5. *Involve experts.* Match individual projects to knowledgeable “champions.” Check with experts before implementing any tactics or plans.
6. *Install hand-raising tactics.* Give employees a place to go when they need help. Be sure that access is well-suited to a specific function. For example, asking a floor salesperson to fill out an online form to get help would be less effective than offering a live-time chat.
7. *Measure impact.* Collect a wide range of metrics to see if support is being used as intended, seems helpful to staff, and positively impacts performance.

Shared knowledge is more effective when it’s supported by expertise and experience. No matter what the problem, information and expert opinions are needed for solutions.

LAYER 3: REINFORCEMENT

Learning is wasted unless people remember and use the knowledge they gain. Reinforcement techniques help people remember and employ information. Effective tactics include:

- Role-play scenarios.
- Virtual simulations.
- Knowledge checks.
- Reflection and discussion.

Build a reinforcement layer with these seven basic steps:

1. *Determine skill requirements.* Determine what skills employees need to fulfill a one- to three-year plan.
2. *Outline audience personas.* Understand audience availability, technology capability, and environment.
3. *Match personas to tactics.* Decide what tactics best fit each audience profile.
4. *Select delivery tools.* Use virtual reality (VR), simulators, and other platforms for learning.
5. *Build materials.* Develop content and materials to support reinforcement tactics.
6. *Socialize practice.* Gain stakeholder buy-in through transparency and inclusion.
7. *Run experiments.* Start small and build up through trial and error.

Use reinforcement, along with coaching, at all levels to facilitate decision making.

LAYER 4: COACHING

Effective coaching skills are built on insight, skill, and priority. For insight, coaches need data and feedback. Necessary skills include listening, monitoring, communicating, and building trust. Coaches also need to know how to organize and prioritize goals and time.

Build a solid coaching layer with these six elements:

1. *Assess the coaching culture.* Ask employees and stakeholders where coaching is needed, then ask managers how prepared they are to coach. Use the results as a current baseline.

2. *Establish expectations.* Pinpoint what role coaching is to play and who'll be supported.
3. *Identify insight needs.* Determine where and how needed data can be gathered and analyzed to plan and facilitate coaching.
4. *Provide practice opportunities.* Use interactive scenarios and role-playing to integrate coaching into learning programs.
5. *Introduce technology.* If needed, resort to AI coaching tools and technologies to supplement or replace managers.
6. *Measure effectiveness.* Conduct employee surveys and gather data to determine if coaching is having desired impacts.

Coaches provide personalized support at all levels of the workforce, so treat them as indispensable resources.

LAYERS 5 AND 6: PULL AND PUSH TRAINING

"Must do" training is *push* training; optional training is *pull* training. Both are important to creating a strong MLE. Use the *3B content curation method* to gather training and knowledge: *borrow* opensource and crowd-funded resources, *buy* e-learning and virtual training platforms, and *build* knowledge bases.

The push and pull layer is built on the following four points:

1. *Assess required training.* Take a realistic look at current training systems and procedures. Upgrade default platforms and operations that are less than ideally functional.
2. *Implement microlearning principles.* Break long courses or skill programs into short, stackable sections. Target modules to specific audiences.
3. *Dig into compliance requirements.* Understand why training and learning requirements exist and apply MLE principles to maintain them.
4. *Apply a curation mindset.* Maximize current resources and build only when necessary.

Use a blend of the 3Bs to balance L&D and satisfy a variety of stakeholders.

APPLY THE MLE FRAMEWORK

When applying the MLE framework, start with your audience as a first priority and apply results-first solutions. Use audience personas to customize learning experiences. For example, if frequent injuries in a warehouse are an issue, the results-first approach is to set elimination of injury as a goal and identify warehouse workers and managers as the target audience.

Engage the problem with a specific solution, such as a change in lifting protocols, and provide timely, targeted training. Consider the following aspects as part of any modern learning solution:

- *Context.* Identify where and when your target audience needs help.
- *Criticality.* Determine how problematic failure is in regard to the specific issue.
- *Complexity.* Decide how challenging the problem is.
- *Timeliness.* Determine how quickly a solution is needed.

Match responses to tactics to apply the MLE to any situation.

MAKING TECHNOLOGY DECISIONS

Technology is necessary to build a strong MLE and should be applied on a persona-based system. To design a persona-based learning ecosystem:

- Start with knowing what outcomes should be achieved.
- Design training experiences for specific audiences.
- Identify data requirements.
- Select appropriate technology platforms.

Monitor tech performance to get the greatest “bang for the buck.” Be sure to assess capabilities annually, at a minimum.

Collect and analyze as much data as possible to refine and perfect audience personas. Better information enables faster, more efficient learning models that can be created and implemented.

THE DATA SIDE OF THE STORY

Reliable metrics help make L&D proactive, validate systems, keep employees and systems future-focused, and boost your organization’s overall “skill economy.” Good data is built on the following five principles:

1. *Volume.* A meaningful amount of data must be collected.
2. *Velocity.* Data must be current enough to inform real-time decision making.
3. *Variety.* Different sources of data are needed to create a reliable picture.
4. *Veracity.* Data must be trustworthy and free of manipulation.
5. *Value.* Data must be significant enough for inclusion into decision making processes.

The best bet is to use continuous measurement, where metrics are gathered and analyzed as an operational norm.

MASTERING THE SHIFT

A strong MLE will provide your organization with a competitive edge. Use it along with stakeholder trust to win the “game of influence.” You can do so by follow these steps:

- *Clarify your objective.* Define a clear goal and match it to a strategy.
- *Identify your stakeholders.* Know who’s needed to bring the plan to life.
- *Match stakeholders to tactics.* Match stakeholder profiles to personalized tactics.
- *Implement and evaluate.* Nurture and monitor important stakeholder relationships.

The shift to new learning methods shouldn’t be disruptive. Use the MLE framework to determine when and where to seamlessly make changes in your current operations and systems. Once engaged, the MLE will continue to strengthen and evolve on its own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JD Dillon's 20+ year career can be broken down into three phases. First, he worked in operations and HR management with companies like AMC and Disney. He then transitioned into L&D leadership roles with Disney and Kaplan. Now he's on the technology side of workplace learning and performance as Axonify's Chief Learning Architect, where he builds products and services used on the job by millions of employees around the world. Dillon is a respected author, keynote speaker, podcaster, and online host with a passion for helping people do their best work every day. He's also the founder of LearnGeek, through which he publishes a variety of content and advises organizations on their learning, performance, and technology strategies. He graduated from the University of Central Florida with degrees in communications (radio/TV production focus) and marketing and earned an MBA from Kaplan University.

PURCHASE THE BOOK
