PARTNER for PERFORMANCE
Strategically Aligning Learning and Development

Ingrid Guerra-López and Karen Hicks
Contents

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... v

1. The Real Value of L&D ............................................................................................. 1

2. Strategic Alignment ................................................................................................. 13

3. ALIGN Expectations ............................................................................................... 31

4. ALIGN Results ........................................................................................................ 59

5. ALIGN Solutions ..................................................................................................... 79

6. ALIGN Implementation .......................................................................................... 93

7. Strategically Aligning the L&D Function ................................................................. 109

8. Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 121

Appendix A. Strategic Alignment Process Toolbox ..................................................... 127

Appendix B. L&D Alignment Diagnostic ....................................................................... 159

References and Related Readings ............................................................................... 163

About the Authors ....................................................................................................... 169

Index .............................................................................................................................. 171
Introduction

There are a considerable number of sources on strategically aligning training to the business. Unfortunately, most of the literature about strategic alignment, particularly within learning and talent development, is fundamentally flawed. Much of what has already been written comes from a preimposed solution mindset and, in many cases, a training mindset. Loose associations between how much an organization spends on training and the organization’s success are often touted; however, what is referred to as a “strategic alignment approach” typically consists of a solution-driven analysis and design process.

What’s wrong with that, you might ask? This training mindset illustrates an inherent bias toward familiar solutions, rather than ensuring organizational accomplishments. While analysis and design may improve the look and feel of the solution, they often do little to improve the organization’s strategic results. No amount of analysis and design will deliver worthwhile results if you have picked the wrong solution.

Our experience over the last few decades—along with feedback from clients, colleagues, and students, as well as support from the research literature—indicates that our ability to deliver meaningful results rests on genuinely and actively collaborating with our clients to address problems and opportunities. This has important implications for what we are expected to do and deliver.

*Partner for Performance* sets out to help you, the L&D professional, establish partnerships that measurably contribute to organizational success—and provide you with a practical set of frameworks, processes, tools, and skills to meet those expectations effectively. Helping or adding value requires a consultative approach in which you partner with clients—whether you work within an organization or offer your services as an external party—to collaboratively define, understand, and address important performance problems and opportunities. This consultative approach is based on trust, openness, and authenticity. If a client submits a request you think won’t help, and perhaps even make matters worse, you must be able to say so compellingly and empathetically.
A consultative approach requires you to ask questions—a lot of questions—that come from a “help me understand” mindset, rather than to assume you always have the perfect solution in mind. Given that clients know their context better than you ever will, opening the relationship with a line of questioning allows you to help them recognize the underlying, interrelated symptoms behind a problem.

Recognizing the integrated nature of organizations—creating fit among organizational activities in relation to internal and external environments—is a critical aspect of strategic alignment. Strategically oriented organizations do not want to waste time, energy, or money on activities that aren’t essential to success. They connect action to a value-added purpose that interacts with and reinforces other activities. They carefully consider how to deploy their resources to the processes that will have the greatest impact on their strategic priorities.

L&D professionals will succeed and thrive if they view their roles as much more than mere deliverers of learning services and products, and instead form partnerships with managers to drive performance aligned to the strategic priorities by generating, sharing, and using timely and relevant performance data to support decision making and action.

To influence how L&D professionals view themselves and their role, this book will use the term performance improvement professionals interchangeably with L&D professionals. It is important to stay focused on performance and broaden your range of tools and approaches for improving it. Your sustained value depends on moving out of familiar frameworks, actions, processes, knowledge, and even job titles and roles to expand beyond your comfort zones.

The focus of the alignment process described in this book is to ensure a clear and measurable relationship between L&D initiatives and the strategic priorities of the organization. This book also introduces a framework for assessing, designing, and evaluating the alignment of learning and development as a functional unit by what they do and how they do it.

**How This Book Is Organized**

The first two chapters provide the conceptual framework for the approach to strategic alignment. While two foundation chapters might seem a bit long for some, we believe that before you commit to shifting your approach you must have a compelling rationale for doing so, as well as a clear idea of what strategic alignment is and is not. Chapter 1 describes the evolving realities and expanded context within which L&D professionals must make contributions. Chapter 2 provides a thorough discussion about how we approach alignment, and the key considerations L&D professionals face as they seek to support desirable change and consequences in their organizations.
Then you’ll go through the detailed process for strategically aligning L&D solutions to organizational priorities. Chapter 3 covers the first major phase of strategic alignment: uncovering stakeholder perceptions and expectations. Chapter 4 details the process for gathering empirical evidence to strengthen how you define problems and opportunities. Chapter 5 describes how to analyze causal factors and use those factors to select innovative solutions. Chapter 6 introduces the key elements for designing effective workplace implementation and transfer strategies.

Finally, we present the framework for aligning the entire L&D functional unit of an organization to support strategic priorities through performance-driven mechanisms and processes. The appendix provides readers with a full list of tools used throughout this book for easy reference, replication, and customization.
The Real Value of L&D

Organizations are critical components of our social fiber. Whether government institutions or nongovernment organizations, business or nonprofit, healthcare, education, or military, they are a major engine of economic and social activity. We all have a stake in their effective functioning, and L&D professionals in particular can play a key role in their sustainable success.

Organizations have strategic goals they strive to achieve, as well as operational imperatives to help reach these strategic goals. They choose strategies that enable them to achieve a competitive advantage and remain sustainable. Members execute strategies to sustain, grow, or develop the organization’s position within the marketplace. Organizations that reach their goals with greater efficiencies and effectiveness recognize the dynamic realities and the possibilities for aligning performance at every level of the organization.

Organizations that use performance-driven processes to improve the competence of their people have found a consistent way to ensure that the right people are communicating with one another about the right things, thus better aligning their programs and services with their needs and building stronger relationships with organizational leaders. This requires a paradigm shift in how L&D professionals view their role and how they align their work to organizational objectives and strategies through enhanced partnerships with management. These partnerships grow over time, and they begin by focusing on important shared needs and the belief that the partnership will be conducive to meeting those needs.

Smart organizations refer to their people as their competitive advantage, because they make the difference. Think about your interactions with companies. Would you pay a little more for a product if you knew you would receive exceptional service? Would you choose to purchase products or services from an organization whose quality was
inconsistent or unreliable? As a customer, you consider such criteria to decide with which organizations you choose to do business.

One of the primary functions of L&D professionals is developing workforce capabilities to maximize the competitive advantage organizations receive from their employees. By focusing your efforts and solutions on leveraging and developing this advantage, you align L&D to business needs—and generate real value.

And yet, talent development solutions, while at the heart of organizational success, can be expensive endeavors for organizations. Organizations rightly question their value when not clearly linked to strategic priorities before their selection and design. To ensure sound decisions regarding talent development strategies, L&D professionals must identify the tangible results that are gained from performance improvement efforts. Doing so leads to solutions that measurably help the organization achieve strategic objectives, and provides L&D professionals with hard evidence of their contribution to organizational success. Documenting these successes is critical for the function’s growth, credibility, and sustainability as a true strategic partner.

The value of L&D should not be measured by the size of its budget, how many initiatives it launched, or how many people participated in its programs. These measures simply indicate resources (money and time) consumed and hours worked. Rather, value comes from the quantifiable improvement in human and organizational performance.

A Paradigm Shift

Consider your last talent development initiative and reflect on whether you had clear answers to the following questions before it was selected and designed:

- What factors influence human performance in the workplace, and how do they relate to one another?
- Which factors will the initiative affect? What do you know and what do you assume you know? What evidence do you have that it will be effective?
- What human performance results do you expect after the initiative?
- How will you measure the initiative’s impact on organizational performance?
- How will the organizational structure support or hinder the changes in human performance you expect to see?
- What changes to the work environment must occur to realize expected results?
- How will you maintain desired workplace performance?

We believe the most important paradigm shift a performance improvement professional can make is to move beyond a solution-driven mindset and instead adopt a performance-driven mindset. It goes beyond the obsolete approach of simply fulfilling a training request. The answers will clarify strategic priorities, the use of resources, and even how products and services are offered to clients.
What would your stakeholders consider to be a valuable use of learning and talent development initiatives? What returns and benefits has your organization received for the investment in learning and talent development? Organizations that can demonstrate strategic alignment and use performance data to inform their actions and justify resource spending have a much better chance at sustainable organizational contributions and success. In this book, we provide a process for demonstrating this alignment and generating the data required to make sound decisions about learning and talent development.

An Expanding Mindset

While your organization might only think of performance improvement efforts as expenses, you can change these perceptions with a new mindset to carrying out your work. To start, you need to think of organizations as a system and expand the role you play within that system.

Consider your own performance for a moment. Are your behaviors or how you approach your work specific to the context of your organization? How does the organizational culture influence your interactions with others, your work output, your accountability for results, or the expectations others have of you? How do the tools and resources available to you influence your performance? W. Edwards Deming, one of the leading management thinkers of our time argued that “a bad system will beat a good person every time.” This describes the power of an organizational system and how critical it is for performance improvement professionals to think about their work and its influence on the performance within the system, as well as the performance of others in their organizations.

Interactions with the work environment influence performance. For successful implementation of your performance improvement initiatives, you must understand your organization’s anatomy and how your work fits within this anatomy. The importance of developing your ability to synthesize issues and elements throughout the organization cannot be overstated. Analysis of the issues is important, but it is not sufficient. You must not only look at performance problems in detail, but you must also look for how those problems relate to the system structure, culture, and other key organizational elements.

Consider the analogy of human anatomy. The body consists of many parts working together, interacting as one human system. Your arm does not operate independently of your shoulder. When you feel pain, you visit the doctor who examines where it hurts and what triggers the pain. How does this pain affect other parts of your body? How do other parts of your body influence the pain? How would various treatment options affect not only what hurts, but also other parts of your body? How will taking two medications concurrently affect you? Just as the doctor considers the whole body, you must consider all parts of the organizational system when opportunities for improvement are needed. You can do this by reverse engineering performance in organizations—start with the goal
in mind, uncover the important factors (and their relationship) for reaching the goal, and engineer human performance in alignment with organizational performance.

Strategic business partnerships are the new way to do business in L&D roles. It is an alliance you form, over time, with your stakeholders and decision makers to ensure the work you do is strategically valuable and produces desired results for the organization. These partnerships also facilitate your desire to take an active role in the decisions that affect human performance in organizations. If you want a seat at the table, you must proactively think, behave, and perform like a strategic partner.

Note that your initial involvement might be driven by your technical expertise, so your technical perspective and advice are critical. However, for your technical expertise to have maximum impact, you must also demonstrate business acumen and certain personal attributes that support a trusting relationship with your clients. For example, imagine yourself in a meeting with high-level management. They are concerned about the changing patterns in consumer behavior and how they are influencing sales revenue, yet the focus of your observations are on reducing cognitive load of sales trainees. Do you think that enhances your credibility as a strategic business partner?

Your expertise about how people learn and perform should be conveyed in a way that concretely resonates with your partners and builds trust in your ability to help drive worthy results.

The following examples highlight what the requestor is looking for when establishing a strategic partnership, and how you may engage or demonstrate this skill, behavior, or attribute. As you read these, you may want to consider adding additional items you consider important:

- **Business Acumen:**
  - You understand the emerging needs of the business.
  - You know the business value chain.
  - You communicate in business language (written and verbal).
  - You understand the context in which the business operates.
  - You are aware of what is necessary to execute the organization’s strategies.
  - You understand how your efforts are linked to the organization’s mission.

- **Personal Attributes:**
  - You use teamwork to approach problem solving and decision making.
  - You have good communication skills.
  - You are caring.
  - You work proactively and continuously to develop and foster trust.
  - You are sincere in your desire to create win-win outcomes for those who will influence and be influenced by the solution.
º You are responsive to business and personal needs and can balance them.
º You are transparent with your work.
º You work proactively to gain support from management.

• **Technical Skills:**
º You provide the business case for all learning decisions.
º You plan how to integrate learning solutions throughout the organization.
º You conduct a needs assessment to inform the selection, design, and delivery of strategic solutions.
º You offer just-in-time learning solutions to address current business needs.

**Essential Skills for the New Generation of L&D Professionals**

To support this reverse engineering approach to performance improvement, it is critically important to be aware of the cognitive habits that drive your technical tasks and behaviors as you seek to improve human and organizational performance. These cognitive skills frame your view of the world and, in turn, how you approach your technical work. This provides a strong, flexible, and scalable base for understanding performance problems in their unique contexts, and selecting the best solution across a variety of situations.

If the L&D function is going to evolve to provide real value to the organization, it must take a system view of the organization to understand the relationships and interactions across various issues, events, and consequences. It must also apply strategic thinking to clarify where the organization wants to go, where it currently is in relation to that destination, and how to best get there. Critical thinking is foundational for both system and strategic thinking; those who don't master basic critical thinking skills are not likely to go far within the organization. Likewise, collaboration skills are key to getting things done. Organizations comprise groups of people who must partner effectively to make things happen and achieve results.

System thinking, strategic thinking, and critical thinking are all complementary processes that the new generation of L&D professionals will have to master to build credibility, become strategic partners to management, and add real value to the organization. These skills are not necessarily new, but they must be further developed and consistently applied from a broader perspective.

Next, let’s delve into the specific tasks and steps associated with each of these core skills. It should be noted that while design thinking is not discussed specifically, these core skills are also the foundation for design thinking. These core skills will later be linked to the strategic alignment process.
System Thinking

Systems thinking is a management discipline that is concerned with the understanding of a system by examining the linkages and interactions between the components that comprise the whole system. In this book, we use the term system instead of systems as a reminder that strategic alignment requires we deal with the whole system, not just the subsystems (Kaufman 2000). The system thinking approach to problem solving and decision making identifies the impact of a problem (and potential solutions) on various segments of the organization (personnel, departments, customers, suppliers, and so forth). It is a way of thinking about how people, processes, and structures work together in organizations to see the patterns and cycles of performance in your organization. Rather than perceiving performance issues as isolated, you can see the relationships and interactions among various parts of the organization. This view is holistic and essential to gaining an understanding and appreciation for how any performance solution will perform within the organization. For performance improvement practitioners, this means approaching requests for solutions as triggers for diagnosis and alignment. System thinking helps you focus on the root causes of performance problems and their interrelated nature, and highlights which initiatives are likely to successfully address those root causes—and which are not likely to help, and perhaps even aggravate the situation in the long run.

Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is a long-term perspective to problem solving and decision making where performance improvement practitioners think from multiple timeframes with a focus on what has to be accomplished to achieve desired results. A strategic thinking approach to performance improvement offers opportunities to generate value, specifically aimed at the strategic priorities of organizations. You can purposefully facilitate this strategic value by creating the links, or fit, between the work you do and the value it ultimately adds to your organization. Strategic thinking involves adhering to objective analysis; planning ahead; thinking of how people, processes, and structures fit together; focusing on the organization’s unique advantage or differentiator; and identifying gaps between where the organization is today and where it wants to be in the future and devising appropriately aligned improvements to help the organization realize desired results.

Critical Thinking

Performance improvement practitioners apply critical thinking to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information that supports decision making. These critical thinking activities are carried throughout the strategic alignment process. Some examples are:
• developing an orderly approach to prioritize tasks based on severity and urgency
• applying metacognitive knowledge that allows them to monitor their own performance
• determining credibility of sources and synthesizing this information to formulate and communicate decisions
• generating an objective, reasoned method to select among several solution options
• presenting a coherent and persuasive argument for decisions to different audiences.

Collaboration

Performance improvement work in organizations is highly collaborative. You work with others to problem solve, make decisions, implement those decisions, and evaluate the results of those decisions. You work toward common goals with the intent of achieving positive results for those within, and outside, the organization. A collaborative approach to performance improvement is central to changing the expectations and perceived value of your work. It involves representation for all stakeholders and gives explicit attention to cross-functional dialogue. Such relationship building creates a joint effort to helping your stakeholders and organizations reach their goals, and ultimately, to improve the perceptions and utility of your efforts as strategically and valuable.

Some examples of collaboration in performance improvement work include:

• effective listening to better understand value from the perspective of your stakeholders and to understand the context of the performance challenge or opportunity
• driving teamwork that recognizes and rewards achievement of group and organizational goals, rather than individual performance in the spirit of competition
• establishing partnerships to team up with other groups in the organization and reduce silo work
• supporting and committing to group decisions to foster teamwork and shared accountabilities for performance improvement efforts.

The skills described here embody the questions we ask ourselves and others, which in turn shape our view of specific situations and the world in general. Asking the right questions is one of the most important things you can do in your work. Yet, preparation and practice in asking the right questions seems hard to find for L&D professionals. Let’s turn our focus to the art of skill of asking questions.
Asking the Right Questions

Research indicates that children ask hundreds of questions a day, but as we get older, this number consistently drops. Part of this has to do with our education system, which in turn shapes societal norms and expectations. We are asked to sit quietly and are rewarded for having the answers, rather than asking questions. The number of questions we ask appears to significantly diminish by the time we are in middle school, and interestingly, some research has also found that student creativity and engagement also significantly plummets around this time (Craft, Gardner, and Claxton 2015). While it’s difficult to say whether there is cause and effect and in which direction it runs, the trend of asking fewer questions as we get older is troubling.

Deborah Meier is an award-winning pioneer known for her radical model for schools designed to foster inquiry and for her work with Central Park East schools in New York City. Meier tells the story of a third grader who described what was different about her school: “you are interested in what we don’t know, not just what we do know” (Berger 2016). Meier believed that instead of just shoving information at kids, schools should teach them how to make sense of that information, so they could interpret it and figure out what to do with it. Her main concern was with developing children into critical thinkers and problem solvers who could add value to a democratic society. Consequently, she outlined five habits of mind, which served as the foundation of her school philosophy and approach:

- **Evidence**: How do we know what is true or false? What evidence counts?
- **Viewpoint**: How might this look if we looked at it from a different direction
- **Connection**: Is there a pattern? Have we seen something like this before?
- **Conjecture**: What if it were different?
- **Relevance**: Why does this matter?

These habits happen to be a succinct way to synthesize the essential skills described in the previous section. You will see them embodied in the strategic alignment process described throughout this book.

Of course, the art of questioning has been around for thousands of years. The philosopher Socrates developed the Socratic Method, which is a form of cooperative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering the right questions to stimulate critical thinking, and to draw out assumptions and ideas. Socrates is known as one of the great educators in history, and he taught by asking questions with the purpose of challenging accuracy and completeness of thinking in a way that moved people toward a valuable and ultimate goal.

There are various lines of Socratic style questions that can help us have substantive conversations with our clients and generate shared conclusions. These questions are meant to challenge what people think they know from a collaborative perspective.
As with any tool, they can be used well or used poorly. They should be asked from a place of “help me understand” rather than “I don't believe you,” so appropriate delivery, wording, and pacing should be considered, especially when asking “why” questions. Table 1-1 provides six different types of questioning—conceptual clarification questions; probing assumptions; probing rationale, reasons, and evidence; probing viewpoints and perspectives; and probing implications and consequences—as well as their purpose and examples of each.

Table 1-1. Types of Socratic Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Clarification Questions</td>
<td>Help others think deeper about the underlying concepts of their arguments</td>
<td>• Why are you saying that? • What exactly does that mean? • How does this relate to what we have been talking about? • What do we already know about this? • Can you give me an example? • Are you saying . . . or . . . ? • Can you rephrase that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing Assumptions</td>
<td>Help others think about the unquestioned beliefs that underlie their arguments</td>
<td>• What else could we assume? • Are you assuming . . . ? • How did you choose those assumptions? • Please explain why . . . ? • How can you verify or disprove that assumption? • What would happen if . . . ? • Do you agree or disagree with . . . ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing Rationale, Reasons, and Evidence</td>
<td>Help others think through their reasoning rather than assume it is a given</td>
<td>• Why is that happening? • How do you know this? • Can you give me an example of that? • What do you think causes that? • What evidence is there to support what you are saying?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing Viewpoints and Perspectives</td>
<td>Help you challenge particular viewpoints</td>
<td>• Another way of looking at this is . . . Does this seem reasonable? • What alternative ways of looking at this are there? • Why is . . . necessary? • Who benefits from this? • What is the difference between . . . and . . . ? • Why is it better than . . . ? • What are its strengths and weaknesses? • What if you compared . . . and . . . ? • How could you look at this another way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing Implications and Consequences</td>
<td>Help you consider logical implications that can be foreseen</td>
<td>• Then what would happen? • What are the consequences of that assumption? • How could . . . be used to . . . ? • What are the implications of . . . ? • How does . . . affect . . . ? • How does this fit with what we learned before? • Why is it important?</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Keep the following guidelines in mind as you consider what questions must be asked:

- **Directness.** Consider how straightforward you want to be about your questions. Keep in mind who you are asking and what the appropriate way to ask the question is.

- **Open versus closed.** Consider what you want to know. Asking closed yes or no questions will give you limited information. Asking open-ended questions will allow the respondent to expand, explain, and even shape subsequent questions. While closed-ended questions can be helpful in confirming facts, they should be used sparingly, as they typically constrain you to narrow information.

- **Approach and tactics.** The value is not just in what questions you ask, but how you ask the questions. Over time, you want to develop your ability to combine different types of questions that complement each other well. Consider starting with probing questions that help you gather facts and perceptions (mainly descriptive). Then continue with probing questions that help you analyze the underlying assumptions, logics, and evidence. Finish with questions that help you begin to think about the future and alternatives.

- **Questions to avoid.** While you want to use a range of questions to broaden your understanding of the issues, there are some questions that you want to steer clear of. Avoid leading questions, which plant a seed in the respondent. You also want to avoid asking multiple questions at once, because the respondent will end up tackling the one he wants to answer, while ignoring the others. Finally, you also want to minimize direct “why” questions. This takes some care, as “why” is a critical question to understand contributing factors and root causes. But you also need to be thoughtful about how you ask these questions to avoid appearing critical or combative. Other ways of asking “why” questions include “tell me more about” or “what do you think are the reasons for . . . ?”

Performance improvement practitioners help their organizations more through the questions they ask than through the answers they provide. This does not necessarily mean that you don’t ever have useful answers, but rather that there is much value in the collaborative inquiry you engage stakeholders in to help them leverage their understanding of their situation and organizational culture. Through this process, you also gain their trust and a shared understanding of the important organizational issues. When you help them expand their view of the options they have, they are more likely to recognize the way forward for themselves, with an increased motivation and trust to move in that direction.

Asking the right questions is integral to strategic alignment—to collecting useful evidence about what is working well, what is not working well, why, what the priorities are, and how they should be addressed. Your choice of questions will lead you in a specific
direction, and if you limit the scope of the questions, you will be limited by the information you acquire. An example of limiting your scope is to focus on isolated elements of individual performance, rather than focusing on the organizational system.

**Toward a Focus on the Organizational System**

The conventional view of L&D professionals has focused almost exclusively on employee learning without enough thought given to the performance context of the employee. While there may have been an analysis of important factors such as learner characteristics and preferences, and even the systematic design of the training itself, including knowledge testing to determine knowledge gains, there has been little alignment to the broader organizational context within which employees are expected to apply newly learned skills. This narrow focus misses opportunities to influence and evaluate transfer of learning to the workplace and gains in performance.

Over time, this view has expanded to an employee performance focus, although the preferred solution still appears to be training. This can be seen by an increased discourse on the “transfer of training” and in discussions about improved performance. While this shows some progress, it is unclear if the shift has fully manifested in practice. A true performance perspective requires you to look at the performance system, not the individual performer. Table 1-2 contrasts the traditional focus on employee learning to a performance alignment focus.

**Table 1-2. Traditional View Versus Performance Alignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional View of L&amp;D</th>
<th>Performance Alignment View of L&amp;D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in behavior are a function of individual knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs</td>
<td>Individual knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs are shaped by recurring patterns of behavioral interactions in the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary focus of solutions is the content of knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs—actual behavior will follow</td>
<td>Primary focus of solutions should be behavior—attitudes and ideas should be shaped to support behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance can be isolated and changed individually</td>
<td>Performance of the organizational system has a greater effect on the individual than that of the individual on the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The target of change should be at the individual person (knowledge and skills)</td>
<td>The target of change should be at the organization level (roles, responsibilities, communication, and feedback flows)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By conducting a thorough diagnosis of the performance context and the problem at hand before picking a solution, you will have a greater chance of figuring out the best
solution. But improving organizational performance does not begin and end with deciding on the right solutions. It is part of a broader journey that consists of:

- baseline measures of performance (starting point)
- performance standards and targets (destination)
- viable alternatives based on key factors and criteria (best route and vehicles)
- evaluation framework (how to tell when we have arrived).

From a system view, you can see beyond individual employee performance and understand that you can't do much to influence their performance without addressing the system in which employees interact. It’s important to remember that learning solutions are a drop in the bucket of performance improvement.

It is within this context that we present a detailed process for how to align sustainable performance improvement efforts to the organization's strategic objectives. We discuss examples specifically related to aligning traditional L&D programs to organizational priorities, as well as explore aligning broader organizational improvement initiatives in a variety of contexts. Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of strategic alignment, describing what it is, arguing why to do it, and introducing how to do it, which is then further detailed throughout the rest of the book.