

Target Learning With Curation

Michelle Webb and Jerry M. Kaminski



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Printed in the United States of America.

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TD at Work (ISSN 2373-5570, Electronic ISSN 2373-5589, ISBN 978-1-95394-6-515, Electronic eISBN 978-1-56286-0-004) is published monthly by the Association for Talent Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. *TD at Work* is available for subscription in print or digitally. ATD national members receive a digital subscription to *TD at Work*, plus archive access, as part of their membership dues. The subscription rate for the Monthly All-Access (12 print and digital issues, plus archive access) is \$119 (ATD national members) and \$159 (nonmembers). The monthly digital subscription rate for 12 issues is \$99 (nonmembers). Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional entries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *TD at Work*, 1640 King Street Alexandria, VA 22314. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within three months of the issue date. Copyright © April 2022 *TD at Work* and ATD. All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the express written permission of the publisher. For permission requests, please go to copyright.com, or contact Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (telephone: 978.750.8500, fax: 978.646.8600). ATD Press grants permission for the material on pages 13–16 to be reproduced for personal use.

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We live in a world that is constantly on the move, getting faster and more technology

enabled. While technology has empowered us to access information more readily, it also has provided too much material for learners to wade through. That has led learners to face cognitive overload with the depth and breadth of information presented to them.

To be effective and productive, learners need access to the right information at the right time and with the right context. That is where learning boards—also known as learning pathways, learning programs, and curriculums, among other terms—come into play. As a learning professional, you can develop a learning board strategy for your organization that engages employees' knowledge and helps reduce the struggle with content overload.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, we will detail:

- The what and why of learning curation
- Ways to get started with content curation
- How to build an intelligent curation mindset
- Strategies to shape your learning board process

- Reasons learning board governance is imperative and how to create such oversight

The What and Why of Learning Curation

In today's work environment, L&D professionals face several challenges, including keeping our learning content current and fresh, ensuring we get it in front of learners in a timely fashion, and supporting the business's competitive growth. Those challenges have become even more visible because of increased demands for regular upskilling and reskilling.

For several years, the solution to skilling was to leverage learning experience platforms. With an LXP's built-in aggregation and recommendation engines based on tagged information—for example, keywords, metadata, and skills—learners can find more targeted information and take the next developmental step in their learning journey. Unfortunately, if they don't have context for how the developmental resources pertain to the organization

or their role, the information can only be so useful. While LXPs can provide targeted resources, the systems miss offering organizational context—for example, they may offer “first-level manager” as a keyword but not outline the expectations for that manager. Additionally, both you and learners end up in a search engine conundrum—too much content, competing topics, and an abundance of data. How does the information apply in a particular situation? How does the information work within organizational systems and processes?

Learning boards, however, can go a long way in providing a solution to those challenges. They focus on providing high-value content in a narrowly defined skill or topic area that is contextually and organizationally relevant. Companies that have had success with learning boards focus on key skills and topics that are in high demand or support critical business initiatives at the awareness and knowledge level. Learning boards can also be role specific, making them even more effective because they provide a deeper level of relevance to learners. Note, you are not developing only one learning board but rather a series based on roles, jobs, skills, knowledge, or content. There are no limits to how many you can build as long as you focus on what is contextually and organizationally relevant to learners.

A good way to begin your journey with learning boards is to leverage your peer community and learn from other organizations' success.

Learning Boards vs. Learning Design

At first blush, learning board curation can sound a lot like learning design. Both require a focus on uncovering the problems that need to be solved and providing opportunities to build knowledge. However, learning boards are focused on awareness and basic knowledge, whereas complex knowledge and application are required for learning design. Rather than seeing curation and learning design as two opposing forces, look at them as complementary approaches to solving organizational and learning challenges. While learning design centers more on program and initiative design, learning board curation targets content to a specific skill, role, or topic, which can serve as a springboard or prerequisite to deeper learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, curriculums, and programs. Learning boards can also serve as references or job aids.

Content Curation

Getting started with learning board curation is easier than you may think. You already conduct needs assessments to understand the challenges that your company is trying to solve. You probably also have task analysis data available to aid in that endeavor. Further, you likely have a competency and skill framework that you have mapped to roles to understand how and where employees work—for example, whether they have access to a computer or other device where they can retrieve learning assets as needed. You also have access to job descriptions; the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), a free online database containing occupational definitions; and other online content that will be

There are no limits to how many learning boards you can build.

beneficial as you pursue developing learning boards. You need content relevant to the tasks individuals in specific roles perform, along with the skills, knowledge, and abilities required of them. For example, for a training and development specialist, O*NET lists instructing, active listening, and monitoring as some of the necessary skills. Oral expression and comprehension and written expression are two noted abilities. Work activities include training and teaching others, gathering information, and thinking creatively.

To create learning boards, take the data from those sources, arrange it, and focus on getting curious about the information within the context of the employee experience.

- When are employees most open to, in need of, or available to participate in training?

- What are the moments when employees are in transition and are looking for information, such as onboarding, preparing for a promotion or newly promoted, starting a new project?
- What modalities are available to deliver a learning board?
- What learning modalities do workers prefer?

Armed with that information, begin to build the framework for your learning boards, which will help inform your approach.

Exploring Technologies

While it is tempting to purchase shiny new technology when undertaking a new learning initiative, learning boards don't need complex or cutting-edge technologies to get the job done. Many L&D teams host learning boards within their learning management system, learning content management system, or LXP. Some organizations may also consider using SharePoint or even Excel to outline their learning board content.

Although LMSs often get a bad name, they are the source of truth for organizational learning because they offer you the ability to administer, document, track,

Case Study: Learning From Others

When public utility company Consumers Energy started on its journey with learning boards, it aimed to refresh its learning assets portfolio, modernize the format and delivery processes, and ensure the content remained current. The company also wanted to build an infrastructure and process that would enable it to generate, house, and deliver highly targeted content at the point of need. To gain insights from other companies, Consumers Energy reached out to members of the ATD Forum, a consortium of more than 60 companies that provides a confidential environment for exploring and sharing innovative talent development practices.

Through Forum discussions, Consumers Energy gained a deeper understanding of the assets and approaches that other organizations had used to address similar challenges with developing and housing targeted content for learners. Forum members offered

promising solutions, and Consumers Energy was able to connect with an organization that had been using a learning board approach for almost a decade with outstanding results.

Next, Consumers Energy used a formal connection and benchmarking process to poll Forum members about how to leverage targeted content. More than 20 companies participated and offered various names for learning boards, such as learning pathways, playlists, knowledge boards, and learning channels. The approaches were different in design, delivery, and measurement.

Through the discussions and survey, Consumers Energy was able to accelerate its understanding, gain clarity on processes, and save time and resources by moving past trial and experimentation and directly into implementation.