

THALES
LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT NEEDS



Enhance your potential



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Welcome

Getting results from L&D isn't just about delivering great learning; it is about delivering great learning to the right people, at the right time, and in the right way. Only then will you see a significant impact.

By successfully pinpointing the type of learning that will most benefit your people, and therefore your business, you minimise the risk of failed interventions or wasted costs. More than that, though, by analysing learning needs with your wider strategic goals in mind, the learning you deliver becomes a powerful tool for driving organisational performance.

Identifying L&D needs is not always easy, but there are certain key steps that can be taken which will enable you to achieve the most accurate picture attainable. That is why we have put this guide together – to help you understand some of the most effective ways in which you can identify learning needs, and give you practical advice and actions which you can apply within your own business. You'll learn:

- How to align learning with your business strategy, and why it's important
- Some of the most common key driver which prompt a need for L&D
- What learning needs analysis (LNA) is and how to implement it
- How to undertake LNA if you are a smaller business

If you want to develop your people but you're not sure where to start, the information within this guide will help you get to where you need to be, and give you a firm foundation for identifying L&D needs within your organisation.

[The Thales Learning & Development team](#)

Why identifying L&D needs is important

“There is no point in training people if you don’t know what skills, knowledge or behaviour changes are required”

Nichola Batley, Head of Management and Leadership Capability at Thales Learning & Development

Your L&D will have a bigger impact

Please be in absolutely no doubt – if you want to have a powerful and lasting effect on your people, the L&D you deliver must be based on having spent a significant amount of time and effort – whether from you or a dedicated L&D provider – on understanding the specific skills, knowledge and behaviours required from your people that will help move your organisation forward in the right way. Only then will the learning be capable of having a significant impact on the success of the wider business.

“Companies need to get value for money, and increasingly expect return on investment (ROI). ROI can only be measured if the need was clearly identified at the beginning”

Nichola Batley

Your money will be better spent

L&D has a cost behind it – sometimes a significant one, depending on the level and complexity of the solution in question. Where there is a cost involved, there should also be a process in place that maximises the chance of that solution having an impact. Otherwise you run the danger of simply throwing money at something in the hope that it works. When it comes to L&D, the most effective way to ensure your money is well spent is to pinpoint the true development needs within your organisation before you spent anything on a solution. The initial cost of this process will be far outstripped by the cost savings you make in the long term.

You will uncover weaknesses you were not previously aware of

By undertaking a robust process of learning needs analysis (LNA), you will be able to not only pinpoint the key skills, knowledge and behaviours that could drive your business forward, but

also certain areas of which you may not have been aware that could perhaps benefit from some development. Often it is only by thoroughly investigating and analysing your output from a people point of view that you are able to spot these issues and take the necessary steps to amend them.

Time is precious – don’t waste it

“People’s time is valuable, and L&D needs to be focused on the things they actually need to learn”

Nichola Batley

If you want employee buy-in, and engagement, then you need to make sure you are only sending people on courses or programmes that are genuinely relevant to their development needs. I.E. the skills, knowledge or behaviours they are learning should have a positive impact on their ability to do their job, and their ability to contribute the success of their team and the wider business. Anything else is poor use of their time.

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Aligning L&D needs analysis with business strategy

The 2014 CIPD Learning and Development Survey found that:

- 37% of UK companies expect closer integration of L&D activity and business strategy over the next two years
- An 11% increase on the previous year

These figures clearly show that an increasing number of organisations are seeing – quite rightly – that the most important thing with any significant learning intervention is to ensure it is fully aligned with the wider strategy of the business in which it is being implemented. L&D, at its most powerful, is a means by which significant organisational performance gains can be made. To unlock that potential, however, you need to put the necessary groundwork in before the learning has even begun.

More than ‘box ticking’

Historically, L&D has been seen by some as an expendable cost, which is why many training budgets were slashed during the recession. But that mentality does no justice to the true benefits of L&D, and it is fundamentally flawed in its logic. L&D, rather than simply incurring costs, actually has the ability to create high-performing teams that will, in turn, boost the overall performance of the business and increase profitability. Through tougher, leaner times, that is a benefit which should not be overlooked.



L&D, when treated as a strategic arm of your business, can have a positive impact on all of the following:

- Organisational performance
- Employee engagement
- Staff retention
- And much more

But these benefits simply cannot be achieved unless you undertake your learning needs analysis with the wider strategic goals of your business firmly in mind. Any L&D need you identify should be as a result of asking the following question:

“What skills and knowledge do our people need which will enable them to help the organisation reach goal X?”

That could be a general goal, such as increasing revenue or profit by X amount by the end of the year. Or it could be something more specific, such as improving customer satisfaction in a certain area of the business. Whatever the need, it should always answer the above questions. Only then will your L&D strategy be capable of delivering high-impact results at an organisational level.

“When you undertake needs analysis, you uncover a smorgasbord of information, opportunities and potential. Always ask yourself the question: ‘What is going to make the biggest difference in relation to strategic impact?’”

Sarah Pedder, Learning and Development Consultant at TLD

Top 10 drivers for learning and development needs

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but below are some of the more common drivers that might create an L&D need within your organisation:

1. Lack of capability

Perhaps the most obvious reason to implement a learning intervention is a lack of a particular capability within your business. If your sales team is underperforming, for example, then targeted sales training may benefit them and the business.

2. Change

Organisations often go through change, particularly in today's fast-evolving business world. Whether that change is significant, or minor, it is likely that some form of learning will be necessary in order to achieve a smooth transition.

3. New projects

New projects often require new skills and new methods of approach. If you have taken on a significant new project, there will often be a need for learning to support this, whether it is creating new capabilities or training people on a new system.

4. Targeted/accelerated development

If you have real talent within your organisation, you might want to hone and develop that talent through targeted L&D. The right kind of learning can accelerate the development of potential future leaders, for example, once you have identified those individuals.



5. Poor organisational performance

When your business isn't performing as well as you want it to, it can be down to any number of reasons. There is a good chance, however, that increasing the effectiveness of your people will have a positive impact on the wider organisation, and L&D can enable you to achieve that.

6. Strategic goals

If you have specific strategic goals in mind – winning business in particular markets, for example, or increasing your capability in a certain area – then targeted learning can help you reach those goals. Again, however, this relies on proper learning needs analysis and a strategically aligned L&D function.

7. Employee engagement

By providing staff with the opportunity to learn and grow, and showing them that you are genuinely supportive of their development, you create a much more engaged workforce. The more engaged your employees are, the more productive they are likely to be.

8. Staff retention

If you give your employees a clear career path, and you invest time and money into their development, they are inevitably going to be more likely to stay with your business. Staff turnover costs both time and money, so you are better off investing in the talent you already have and encouraging those individuals to stay.

9. Attracting talent

If you want to attract the best talent in your industry, you need to be able to demonstrate an ability to offer a structured and robust development path for those thinking about joining your business.

10. Regulatory requirements

Sometimes, the need for L&D is as simple as needing to complete regulatory requirements. Meeting those requirements is still important, however, so it is essential to have the right kind of learning in place to ensure it is achieved.

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Learning needs analysis (LNA)

What is LNA?

When we talk about learning needs analysis, we are referring to a means by which an organisation can get a full picture of the skills it needs in order to succeed, the skills it already has which can help fulfil those needs, and the skills it needs to develop in order to better meet them.

There are three key levels at which learning needs analysis can be implemented:

1. **Organisational**
2. **Departmental**
3. **Individual**

Let's take a look at each of those levels in more detail:

Organisational analysis

This is the 'top down' look at the L&D needs of your business, and enables you to understand what type or learning, and

how much of it, is required in order to ensure that all employees have the skills and knowledge required to help the organisation achieve its strategic goals.

Departmental analysis

This looks at specific teams, projects, or areas of your business. When new business is won, new projects created, or new directions taken, the stakeholder departments may require new capabilities in order to deal with that.

Individual analysis

This is often carried out as part of a performance review, or perhaps to accelerate the capability level of specific people within your organisation (high-potential employees, for example).

What does LNA involve?

There are different types of approach to LNA, but two very effective methods you might wish to consider are the CIPD's RAM approach and the Investors in People approach.

The CIPD 'RAM' approach

Based on extensive research, the CIPD developed the RAM approach to learning needs analysis as a way to not only be thorough, but also agile and responsive in a rapidly evolving business environment, and is focused on specific business and organisational outcomes. 'RAM' stands for Relevance, Alignment, and Measurement.

Relevance

Relevance is the key to success in this approach. All learning you deliver should have an impact on your organisation's ability to meet business objectives.

Alignment

Make sure L&D is aligned with other key strategic areas, in addition to the overall organisational strategy. Alignment also means ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are clear on what they want to deliver, and how the learning can help them achieve that.

Measurement

The ability to consistently measure and evaluate the impact of learning is vitally important. This could be return on investment (ROI), or return on expectation (ROE).



The Investors in People approach

The Investors in People (IIP) approach breaks needs analysis down into seven key areas, looking at what needs fall under each category, the type of learning needed in order to address those needs, who requires the learning, and when it should be implemented. The seven areas are as follows:

1. Business goal analysis

Look at the wider goals of your organisation. What do you want to achieve as a business, and what skills or knowledge do your people need in order to help you accomplish that?

2. Legislation/legal analysis

This section is vitally important, particularly for those organisations operating in strictly regulated industries. What does the law require of you, and are you compliant with that? Are any changes in the law imminent, and, if so, are you ready to deal with that?

3. Client/customer feedback

One way to identify key areas for development is through customer feedback. What are they telling you, and are there any patterns in terms of issues being highlighted? If you do not already gather such feedback, you should seriously consider it, as you are potentially missing out on some really valuable information.



4. Critical incidents

When things go wrong in your business, it provides a unique opportunity to learn from the incident in question. If you look back over the past couple of years and think about things that have gone wrong, how could you do things differently? And how could you prevent the same thing from happening by providing the relevant people with targeted learning?

5. Succession planning

This section looks at how you might deal with the movement, or loss, of staff. Such occurrences are inevitable in any organisation, so it is essential to be prepared. Developing people from within, in a planned and structured way, is an effective way to keep your talent pipeline full.

6. Performance trends and measures

This looks at the overall performance of your business, and any particular trends or issues which might need addressing. If your business is underperforming against target, for example, what type of L&D could help get those performance levels back on track and where they need to be?

7. External environment

What is happening within your industry which could mean that you need to develop the skills and knowledge of your staff? Are there changes in the market? What are your competitors doing? Depending on your industry, certain political, technological or social changes could affect you.

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Learning needs analysis for the smaller business

The above techniques are more geared towards larger, more complex, organisations. That is not to say that smaller businesses needn't have a solid process in place for learning and development needs analysis. It is to say, however, that certain criteria need to be taken into account depending on the size or your operation.

For smaller organisations, a number of obvious potential problems arise when looking at the ongoing delivery of L&D.

These include:

- A need to keep costs to a minimum
- An inability to let staff go during key working hours
- Limited historic data if you are a relatively new business

If you are a smaller business, you may be able to overcome the above problems and still undertake effective learning needs analysis by doing the following:

Fully assessing the ROI or ROE of any learning intervention, and the tangible benefit it will bring to your organisation

An L&D provider should be able to help with this. It is, of course, essential for any organisation, regardless of size, to properly assess the benefit of an L&D solution (or any type of solution for that matter), but whereas a larger organisation might have the flexibility of budget to make mistakes, reassess, and realign, a smaller, growing business – whether for financial or time-constraint reasons – does not always have that luxury.

Designing and delivering flexible learning which enables employees to develop around their day job

Again, an L&D provider should be able to help here. When you are looking at the areas in which to develop your people and capabilities, try to work out a way you can approach it which won't have to big an impact on your employees' ability to complete their everyday tasks. This could be achieved through blended solutions, utilising methods such as e-learning, for example, to minimise time away from the workplace and allow delivery outside of working hours.

Reading case studies about organisations in a similar situation to yours

If you speak with an L&D provider, they should be able to provide detailed case studies around any clients they have previously worked with, even if they are not allowed to mention the organisation by name.

Don't be afraid to let an L&D provider come in and assess your business, either. They are not there to pick faults; they are there to help you pinpoint the areas of development which could accelerate the success of your organisation.



L&D needs checklist - what do you need to understand in order to make a decision?

Business objectives

The strategic objectives of your business

The specific objectives of the business unit or team in question

The individual objectives of the people within those teams

How all of these are/are going to be measured

Organisational context

Budget

Company culture

Infrastructure

Availability of technology

Operating nature of the business

Existing L&D capability

Attitudes towards L&D



Benchmarking

Existing capabilities VS where you want them to be

Industry best practice

Competitor analysis

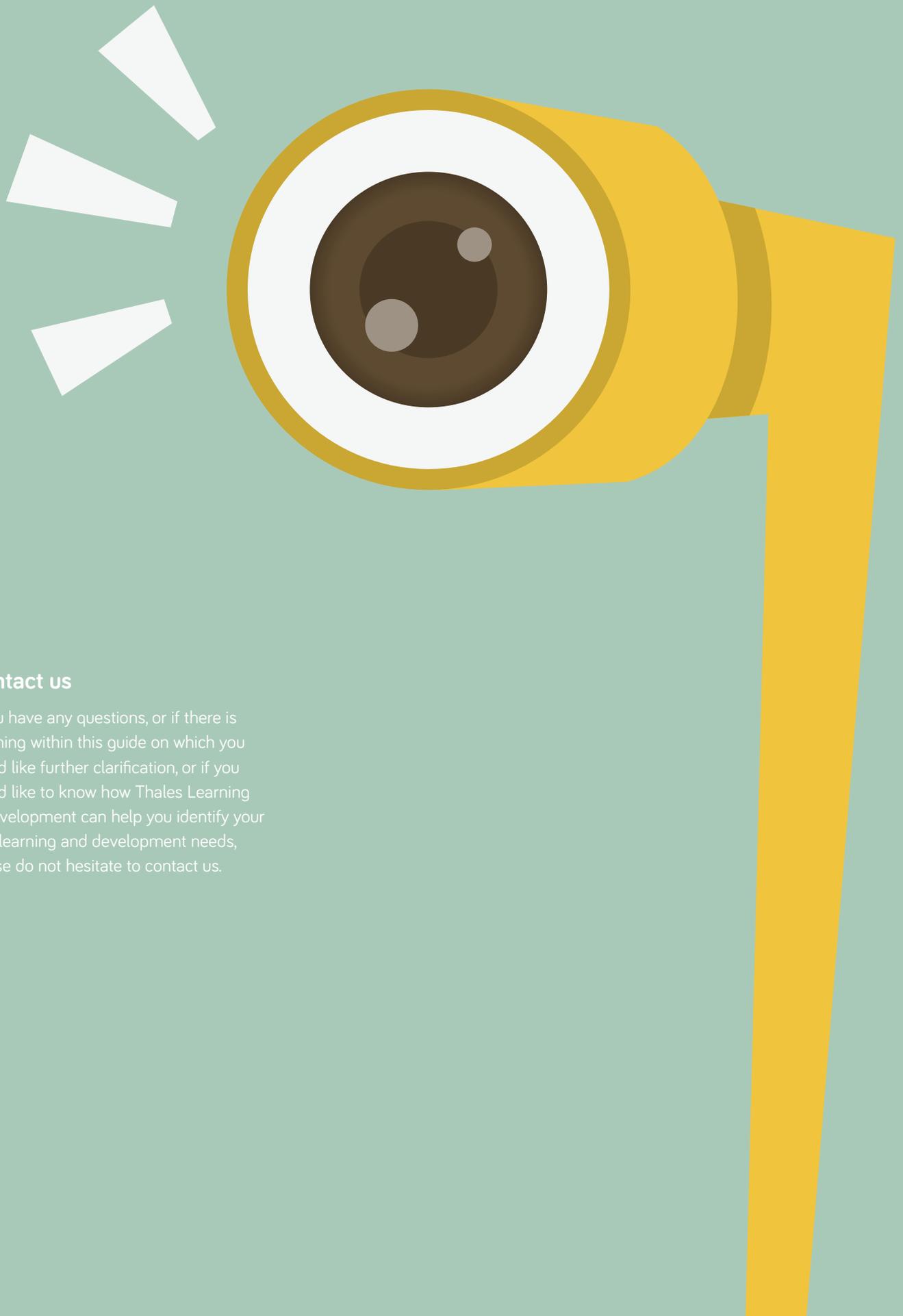
See what has/hasn't worked before

Questions to ask

How much time can people spare to attend training?

What has already been done?

What would happen if you did nothing?



Contact us

If you have any questions, or if there is anything within this guide on which you would like further clarification, or if you would like to know how Thales Learning & Development can help you identify your own learning and development needs, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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