

# REVOLUTIONIZE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

PERFORMANCE AND  
INNOVATION STRATEGY  
FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

CLARK N.  
QUINN



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# **REVOLUTIONIZE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT**

**Performance and Innovation Strategy  
for the Information Age**

**Clark N. Quinn**

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*To all those who work to discover and support the best in human nature.*

## Foreword

Learning & Development is in bad shape. Really bad. So bad that Clark Quinn wants you to sign up to join him in a revolution to overthrow the crap that our once-proud profession has come to.

It's not just that the emperor has no clothes. It's worse. The emperor is so out of step with the times that he must be deposed. Organizations have changed, technology has changed, and the nature of work has changed, but Learning & Development (L&D) has not advanced in the last quarter century.

L&D, which would better be called Performance and Development, is not doing what it can—and what it is doing, it's doing poorly. Other parts of organizations are creating their own solutions. They don't find L&D relevant. They bypass it.

Senior managers say people are their most important asset, but fail to invest in training. The reality is that the return on investment in typical training events is so low that management's attitude makes sense. Training fails to match the way people learn. Training's overwhelming focus on formal learning is criminally stupid. Worst of all, L&D fails to deliver on its intended outcome: helping people get things done.

As Clark says, "It's a racket." Our first step to achieving legitimacy is acknowledging where we are. Change is relentless. Information is exploding. New conditions require perpetual innovation. Time to market is decreasing. Customers are more demanding. Workers must do more with less. It's a puppy-kicking world out there.

In an ever-changing world, learning has become the work. Executing well is not enough to ensure survival. Prosperity requires continuous improvement—and that requires continuous learning.

So what can we do?

*Align learning with what we know about how human brains work.* Humans are good at recognizing patterns and poor at memorizing facts. Most of our learning is subconscious. If we fail to reflect, we don't learn. We are social animals. And we can profit from learning better ways to learn.

*Align learning with modern organizations.* In the industrial era, workers thrived by doing things the “one best way.” Today's winners thrive by coming up with better ways. People need to both collaborate and cooperate on many different levels, and that, in turn, requires “working out loud.”

*Align learning with the amazing bounty of technology.* Networks put all the world's knowledge at our fingertips. Video and virtual worlds empower us to learn in new ways. Flexible systems support performance with outboard brains. Social networks encourage us to learn and work together. Smart phones with more power than yesterday's mainframes connect us to multiple networks. We have all the tools to create learning ecosystems that support continuous improvement.

I'm not going to spoil your fun by telling you what this looks like—Clark does a fine job of that with case studies and commentary from experts. In a nutshell, L&D must shift from learning to performance. Outcomes are what matter.

Some books leave you with a to-do list of priorities that would take Superman a hundred years to get through if he started last Tuesday.

Clark advises us to design wisely, not to try to “boil the ocean.” The “least assistance principle” counsels us to provide as little support as possible to enable individuals to find what they need to know in the world. Let us embrace “slow learning,” rather than overwhelm people.

L&D—and now I’ll start calling it P&D—can delegate lots of learning to performance support and communities of practice.

Clark provides scores of principles and techniques for moving from events to performance, for integrating learning into work, and for positioning P&D among its strategic functional peers. This is great advice.

I’ve signed up for the Performance & Development Revolution. When we’re storming the barricades, I hope I’ll find you by my side.

Jay Cross  
CEO, Internet Time Group and Internet Time Alliance  
Berkeley, California

## Preface

I am on a mission. At two separate learning industry conference expositions early in 2013, it became clear that, while the technology had changed, the underlying models had not. While the world had advanced, Learning & Development had not moved in any meaningful way. The stuff I had railed against a decade ago was still in place. I was, quite frankly, pissed off. I decided that I simply had to make a stab at trying to address the problem.

In trying to foment change, I have looked at what the research says about attitude change, and one of the first elements is recognizing what you are doing—and why it is wrong. Hence, the first part of the book calls out in some substantial depth just what we are doing—and why it is wrong. I am not temperate in this section, I confess; on the contrary, I may be tarring with too broad a brush. I am not apologetic, believing it is better to be too harsh and raise hackles than to have no impact. Reader beware.

As I go forward, I try to point to things we should be looking at: changes in our understanding of learning, organizations, and technology. While not exhaustive, I do point to a number of elements that have been perceived as important indicators. My choices may be overly selective, but they are the elements I feel we are failing to consider. I also try to characterize what it might look like if we were addressing those elements, both conceptually and with some gratefully received contributions.

From there, my focus is on a path forward. My aim is to synthesize the best information I can find; with pointers to those who are pioneering the important areas. I, from need, am making some strategic recommendations on principle

(when I have not found existing guidance), and I try to indicate how I am deriving my recommendations. There is rationale behind them, but in some cases they are speculative, and there is no reason to believe that they will all be right. However, practicing what I preach, there will be a social network that will provide places to refine and improve these recommendations that will be findable via [RevolutionizeLnD.com](http://RevolutionizeLnD.com).

At core, this is a deliberate revolution. There are principles behind what I believe and what I ask of you. I hope to make the case, to the point where you are willing to become a signatory on a Learning & Development Revolution Manifesto. If nothing else, I hope it changes your perspective and starts helping you work better on behalf of your organization.

The ultimate goal is to transform Learning & Development from an unexamined cost center to Performance & Development, a core strategic component of organizational success. This can—and should—be done. I believe in the cause, and I have a strong conviction in the proposed method. I am willing to change the latter, but not the former. I call you to action!

# Acknowledgments

As is properly the case, no such endeavor can be accomplished alone. Many people contributed in many ways to make this happen. None of them wear blame for the contents herein; I maintain responsibility as the ultimate curator and creator.

I want to thank Nadine Rothermel from Agilent and the other participants from the ASTD Forum who provided their valuable time and thoughts about the state of the industry. I received very valuable perspectives from their insights.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to ASTD, including CEO Tony Bingham for approving participation, M.J. Hall of the ASTD Forum for coordinating the Focus Group that provided great insight, Christina Mandzuk of ASTD Research and the rest of the research team for supporting the Focus Group and the survey from which we extracted such great data, and, most of all, Community of Practice Managers Juana Lorens for Learning & Development and Justin Brusino for Learning Technologies, who provided ASTD Research Reports, brokered connections to the rest of the organization, provided feedback consistently, and had my back along the way. Thanks, all!

I have to thank Matt Davis of Wiley as my editor. He suggested the relationship with ASTD that was such a boon, put up with my continual inquiries about Wiley procedure through their reorganization, and served as a personable front end to a large organization. Lisa Shannon at Wiley also was a staunch supporter. Ryan Noll has helped massively in getting my project in on time in a manageable way. Rebecca Taff has been responsible for the



copyediting that keeps me on the level, and Dawn Kilgore graciously shepherded the project to make what seemed like an impossible schedule possible.

Several people also spent time or provided resources in assisting me. Laura Overton from Towards Maturity let me have an early look at their latest report, and Donald H. Taylor of the Learning and Performance Institute provided access to their Capability Map. David Holcombe, Heidi Fisk, Bill Brandon, and David Kelly of the eLearning Guild have provided opportunities for me to present my interim thoughts and acquire feedback.

A particular thanks to my colleagues in the Internet Time Alliance—Jay Cross, Jane Hart, Harold Jarche, and Charles Jennings—from and with whom I have learned much of what is in here. The intellectual contributions are immense and valued.

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Many thanks are owed to my friends and colleagues; many more than can be acknowledged here have contributed in many ways. I have cited those I have found relevant publications for, and you should note those names. Others have provided feedback or connected me to others. They are the colleagues you see at events like Up to All of Us, eLearning Guild, and ASTD conferences, and more. You should strive to get to know them and their work.

On the family side, I owe debts of gratitude to my brother Clif and his family and, most importantly, my direct family: son Declan, daughter Erin, and wife LeAnn for their ongoing support. SCRONsters should be aware that the choice of Drew for the executive was deliberate.

LeAnn in particular is always my best and most trusted advisor, editor, cheerleader, and barrier buster. Her support, red pen to householding, has been instrumental and I'm so deeply grateful (and lucky).

Finally, thanks to you for taking the time to read even this much. I do hope you find this useful, and I welcome your feedback. Here's to making a positive contribution to the organization and, ultimately, the world.

## About the Author

**Clark N. Quinn, Ph.D.**, is an advocate of the potential of technology to facilitate learning and performance. His work has been at the cutting edge in areas such as adaptive, mobile, and content systems. With a particular focus on learning, he has designed and developed innovative solutions for community agencies, schools, industry, and government. The author of *Engaging Learning: Designing e-Learning Simulation Games*; *Designing mLearning: Tapping into the Mobile Revolution for Organizational Performance*; and *The Mobile Academy: mLearning for Higher Education*, Clark has led the design of award-winning online content, educational computer games, and more.

Currently working through Quinnovation as a principal in the Internet Time Alliance, and a charter member of Change Agents Worldwide, Clark provides strategic analysis of organizational learning and knowledge system design to Fortune 500 companies and government, not-for-profit, and education sectors. Clark previously led research and development as director of Cognitive Systems for Knowledge Universe Interactive Studio and held executive positions at Open Net and Access CMC, two Australian initiatives in Internet-based multimedia and education.

A recognized scholar, Clark has an extensive publication record and invited presentations and keynotes at national and international conferences. He has held academic positions at the University of New South Wales, the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, and San Diego State University's Center for Research in Mathematics and Science Education. Clark received his doctorate in applied cognitive

science from the University of California, San Diego, after working for DesignWare, an early educational game software company. Clark was the first recipient of the eLearning Guild's *Guild Master* award in 2012.

# Introduction

This book was written to answer the question: How does Learning & Development (L&D) move forward?

## WHY

This book is written to pull together a number of disparate strands that have circulated about what L&D should be doing. The evidence is substantial that L&D is out of alignment with what is occurring in other areas. As calls for more openness and empowerment in organizations arise, the opportunities to leverage big data and analytics emerge, and new technology advances increase, L&D is still measuring efficiency, not impact, offering courses instead of assistance in the workflow, and not taking advantage of the power of social media.

This book has been written as a call to action—about the need, the means, and the path forward.

## WHAT

This book has four main sections that tell the story of why and how to change.

The first section shows how the world is changing faster, and the evidence that, by and large, L&D is not doing what it can and should be doing—and what it *is* doing it is doing badly. That's a strong claim, but the evidence is compelling. L&D is largely not taking responsibility for performance support or communities, either for employees or for themselves. And the metrics used by L&D are not the metrics that can evaluate the strategic impact on the organization.

The second section overviews the changes in understanding that have occurred and need to be accounted for. These include understanding of our minds, our organizations, and our technology. Our thinking has changed, our understanding of what makes organizations effective has changed, and our technology has advanced at a phenomenal rate.

The third section paints a picture of what it would look like if L&D were doing the job it could and should do. It starts with a revised focus, includes a self-assessment, and some reflections by leaders.

The fourth section is more practical, breaking down the steps and covering pragmatic issues, as well as looking forward.

## **Not**

This book is not a final answer. There are answers in many of the component areas, but the integration is new, and a book is a limited endeavor. An emergent community that will be available from [RevolutionizeLnD.com](http://RevolutionizeLnD.com) will address how the initial ideas presented here can be taken forward. This is a spark, not the whole fire.

This book is also not just about formal learning, nor going all the way to talent management. It is at an intermediary level that covers a strategic element of organizational success.

## **HOW**

The book starts off with data documenting the state of the industry. In partnership with the American Society for Training and Development, data derived from practitioners paints a picture of an industry that is not practicing what it preaches.

The book surveys a number of relevant principles, citing popular books that document the changes that are occurring in the world and our understanding, indicating new elements that must be accounted for.

A framework is presented to guide thinking about the components that should be under the purview of L&D and to characterize the opportunities, including elements of culture, formal learning, performance focus, social learning, infrastructure, and metrics. That framework is systematically leveraged throughout the book.

A series of scenarios detail what the situation would look like for different stakeholders. A selection of case studies from rising or established stars details some practical attempts at moving in this direction. A rethink that details the new ways in which to address this issue is coupled with the thoughts of two pioneers in the field.

Finally, the elements are pulled together and laid out as steps forward. Considerations and paths to be taken in order to adapt these recommended principles to the workplace are covered.

All along the way, pointers are provided to relevant background information or approaches. Appendices include the Learning and Performance Institute's Capability Map detailing the needed skills, the benchmark framework provided by Towards Maturity's work on organizational progress, and ASTD's own model of competency. Also included is a Manifesto for Change.

## **USE**

This book is designed to make the whole case: why change is needed, what to consider, how to rethink, and recommended steps forward. If you already are sold on the need, you can skip the first section. If you are aware of the