Big data and analytics dominate the news in technology and business magazines. Harvard Business Review even dedicated a recent issue to the topics. The influence on business is not limited to IT department or operations. Big data and analytics have substantial relevance for human resources, especially in large organisations where talent drives business performance. The proliferation of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, talent management, and learning management systems has created a massive amount of employee data, and the need for analytical tools and teams to make sense of the data is greater than ever.

For example, Phillips & Phillips (2010) demonstrated that information provided to CEOs is seldom aligned to their needs. CEOs were asked what information they receive about the effectiveness of their learning investments. As expected, most of the information related to learner satisfaction. The information CEOs truly want relates to the impact of training on performance and ROI. According to the study, 96% want performance information but only 8% actually receive it. Likewise, 74% want ROI information but only 4% receive it. Figure 1 (page 126) shows the informational needs of leaders. Additionally, new research by learning analytics company KnowledgeAdvisors, shows that demand for data among HR leaders is increasing. Fifty-two percent are currently asking for human capital metrics and another 29% are soon expected to ask for metrics. This is a substantial increase from 2009 when only

In this case study Teri Schmidt, Shawn Overcast and John R. Mattox II assess the impact of strong data measurement principles at a leading airline.
21% of leaders were asking for quantitative measures and 41% were expected to ask soon. Figure 2 shows the shift among HR leaders – more leaders are asking for metrics.

**SUPPORTING ANALYTICS**

Organisations supplying meaningful data to leaders typically provide it through an in-house analytics team or by outsourcing the analysis to a consultancy, or a combination of both. External consultancies are often employed because organisations do not have the internal demand for analytics, or do not have the personnel with requisite skills to meet the business needs. In their Harvard Business Review article, Davenport and Patil (2012) mention that a data scientist, a person who can manage and analyse big data sets, will be the sexiest role of the next decade.

This leaves organisations with the task of hiring specialised resources or developing those skills among current employees. The airline JetBlue Airways has a history of doing both. Soon after the inception of the company, an assessment, measurement, and evaluation group (AME) was founded to serve the needs of the learning and development department. The group grew to four full-time employees with deep measurement and assessment skills. More importantly, they began to think beyond the L&D group and realised the measurement principles they applied to learning could help other parts of the organisation (Overcast, Schmidt, Lei, Rodgers, & Chung, 2009).

As a result, the group developed a certification programme that is now accredited by the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI). The ongoing goal is to share analytics tools and techniques and evaluation principles that will help analysts, whether in L&D or other parts of the business, think critically about their data and share valuable information with stakeholders to support decision making. When developing measurement talent internally, it is essential to have a framework that outlines knowledge, skills and abilities that make employees successful. Several articles outline critical skills necessary for measurement specialists (Dewey, et al., 2008; Russ-Eft, et al., 2008; Stevahn et al., 2005).

KnowledgeAdvisors synthesised the...
What started as a certification programme aimed at building the analytical capability of L&D professionals has gained visibility and credibility across all functions of the business. It has extended beyond learning to workforce and operations analytics, and customer feedback.

JetBlue’s challenge now is to find relevant examples and to expand its toolkit to encompass tools and templates currently being leveraged, successfully, in other parts of the business. The certification programme has been instrumental in initiating conversations about analytics and how they are used and valued within the firm, and has resulted in cross-functional analysis teams being staffed to very strategic, organisational initiatives.

In a big data world, the organisation that masters the science and art of metrics will build competitive advantage. Technology tools are helpful, and in fact they show a substantial return on investment. For example, a Nucleus Media study indicates that implementing analytics technology has a $10.66 ROI (Netke, 2012). However, employees that have deep analytic and reporting skills, like the AME group at JetBlue, are essential to serving the needs of the business. Competency models and associated assessment tools like the Evaluator Capability Assessment can also supplement development programmes to ensure internal measurement groups know their strengths and can identify their areas for development.

References
