Learning on the Move

Learning is a critical element in an organization’s ability to carry out its strategy and keep up with the changing demands of its customers. But employee expectations about how information and learning are delivered can change as fast as the marketplace. Consumer-driven products like mobile phones and tablets have changed how we ask questions of experts, where we go for help, and how we consume information. Internal knowledge sharing must keep up. Using data gathered between October and December 2011, this Insight will look at how organizations rely on learning to run their businesses more effectively, and how the ways they deliver that learning can keep pace with employee demand. It will also look specifically at mobile learning, and explore how top-performing companies are unleashing learning and learners.

Learning Drives Business

When asked to identify Human Capital Management (HCM) activities most critical to business execution, the Best-in-Class (see sidebar) in Aberdeen’s December 2011 study on HCM Trends 2012 rank learning second only to talent acquisition (Figure 1). Learning is also the one element of the top three significantly more valued by top performers.

Figure 1: Critical HCM Elements to Executing Business Strategy

![Chart showing critical HCM elements to executing business strategy](image)

- **Talent acquisition (sourcing, hiring, and onboarding)**: 60% Best-in-Class, 61% All Others
- **Learning / career development**: 56% Best-in-Class, 47% All Others
- **Employee performance management**: 51% Best-in-Class, 51% All Others

Source: Aberdeen Group, December 2011

Best-in-Class Definition

In Aberdeen’s December 2011 report HCM Trends 2012 the following key performance indicators were used to determine the Best-in-Class for HCM, with top performers achieving impressive results:

- √ 81% of employees rated themselves as “highly engaged” in their most recent engagement survey
- √ 71% of key positions have a ready and willing successor identified
- √ 13% year-over-year improvement in hiring manager satisfaction

Best-in-Class - top 20% of aggregate performance scorers
Industry Average - middle 50% of aggregate performance scorers
Laggards - bottom 30% of aggregate performance scorers
Best-in-Class companies achieved, on average, 79% of organizational KPIs (key performance indicators) or MBOs (management business objectives) in the last year, compared to 39% of Laggard organizations. They also saw nearly four times the year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction (15% vs. 4%), customer retention (11% vs. 3%) and revenue per FTE (8% vs. 2%) over All Other (the combination of Industry Average and Laggard) organizations. Companies that do well by their customers and employees understand that learning is critical to their success.

**The Why of Mobile Learning**

Why is learning important to companies? According to Aberdeen’s data, companies are looking for ways to combat looming skills shortages and find people to lead their organizations into a rapidly changing future (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Pressures Driving Learning and Development Efforts**

![Graph showing pressures driving learning and development efforts](image)

The need to grow, finding and retaining individuals with key skills, and manage the costs of building leaders were themes throughout Aberdeen’s 2011 HCM research. Learning addresses these concerns by helping organizations become more agile and adaptable, building talent from within instead of having to find it externally. Learning touches nearly everyone within the organization, which makes it doubly important. Learning is a way to spread information and keep individuals aligned with business priorities. But, because it is so far-reaching, learning must be managed efficiently and effectively.

Given this, it is not surprising that internal knowledge sharing and learning (both formal and informal) are the areas within HCM where mobile tools are most widely used (Figure 3).

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Figure 3: HCM Activities Where Mobile Tools are Used

Source: Aberdeen Group, December 2011

This data is from a survey on the use of mobile tools specifically for HCM purposes. These tools are used to connect people for knowledge transfer, both formally and informally. The data reflects significant growth in the last 18 months. In Aberdeen’s June 2010 study, Mobile HCM: Workforce and Talent Management on the Move, 30% of respondents indicated they used mobile tools for internal online communities and forums, 43% for informal learning and development, and 21% for formal L&D. This represents a two-fold increase in the prevalence of mobile tools for formal learning in 18 months, indicating that mobile is no longer just a nice-to-have add-on for learning programs, but a strategic part of the formal learning plan.

Among the Best-in-Class organizations in the 2012 HCM Trends study, 40% indicate they use mobile technology for talent management (learning, recruiting, etc.), as compared to 11% of All Others. Thirty-seven percent (37%) indicate they use mobile technology for workforce management (scheduling, shift bidding, etc.) versus just 9% of All Others. These two enablers were adopted three to four times more often by the Best-in-Class than by lower-performing companies, making them the most differentiated enablers Aberdeen's study. Mobile tools appear to be aligned with an organization’s ability to more achieve their goals efficiently and effectively.

The What and the How

Mobile tools for learning are an area of growth, but many organizations are just beginning to explore how they can be used. As with all mobile tools in HCM, there are two sides to consider when implementing or choosing how to integrate mobile learning. The first is how these tools can improve the efficiency or effectiveness of learning administration, and the second how these tools can deliver an enhanced learning experience. As Figure 4 shows,
the latter consideration is most common among users of these devices today. Truly mobile devices are seen as a gateway to collaboration and knowledge dissemination.

**Figure 4: L&D Activities on Mobile Devices**

Extended enterprise learning was a key differentiator for the Best-in-Class in Aberdeen's October 2010 study on Learning & Development, and mobile learning is one way organizations are keeping pace with this trend. While 96% of respondents say their mobile learning tools are aimed at employees, 39% include customers, and 35% extend mobile learning to channel partners and resellers as well. As the value chain for today's organizations widens into a network, mobile will be an important tool for reaching these external audiences.

Organizations are also exploring which content types are available for such devices. Since companies are most likely to use mobile tools to provide access to people and learning content, they must rethink how to deliver not only offline static content through document downloads, but also, interactive and streaming content that relies on a network connection, as well as supporting offline viewing or interaction combined with synching upon reconnection with a network. As we see in Figure 5, document access still reigns supreme, deployed nearly twice as often as more interactive learning modalities and tools.
But once organizations move beyond sharing PowerPoint slides Word documents, their strategies become mixed, including: offering online access with the mobile device as a lens, fostering interaction between employees, and allowing content to be downloaded for viewing when network access is not available—for example, on a plane or commuter train. There is no single clear use case yet for connected versus offline versus collaborative learning. When asked about the content access capabilities organizations expect from mobile learning solutions, 73% cited making learning content available for download / offline viewing, and 70% expected delivery of learning content via streaming from a network connection. This is not an either/or question for most organizations.

Changing device types complicate the landscape even more. While two-thirds (66%) of organizations support a mobile phone platform for mobile HCM activities, 43% support at least one or more tablet device, and an additional 39% plan to support one or more tablet in the future. In learning, where seeing, hearing and doing all combine to help ensure comprehension, the additional real estate of a tablet screen may dramatically increase a program's effectiveness. As organizations adopt these technologies, they will have to find the delivery mechanisms which have the greatest impact, and support the device types their particular audiences require.

**Overcoming Barriers**

Most organizations are still figuring out mobile devices. Technological innovation often occurs faster than organizations can absorb it, and sometimes one part of the company may move at a different rate than
another. As Figure 6 illustrates, budget is a top concern, but beyond that, most barriers take the form of indifference toward, or poor understanding of, mobile HCM.

**Figure 6: Barriers to Implementing or Expanding Mobile HCM**

HR must work with IT to address security and infrastructure concerns, and once the business understands the value Mobile HCM can create, budget conversations become easier as well. Mobile tools can be no more than shiny objects, but with the right planning, when integrated into a formal learning strategy, these tools can become an integral part of business execution.

**Key Takeaways**

The use of mobile devices for learning and development is rapidly evolving. Organization should keep the following points in mind as they explore this field.

- **Learning drives organizational adaptability.** Companies look to learning as a tool for agility, delivering information and knowledge to individuals to help them meet business goals. But to foster this adaptability, delivery methods must adapt as well, and keep pace with learner needs and expectations. Mobility is a key tool required to keep pace with these rapidly evolving needs.

- **Mobile is about formal and informal.** The use of mobile tools for learning is as much about letting someone comment on a forum as it is about attending an online course. Mobile learning strategy should focus on social interaction as well as formal content delivery.
• **Mobile is still evolving.** From phone to tablet, to mobile video chat and offline content viewing, mobility is evolving. A good mobile strategy should not revolve around having the latest bell or whistle, but around the needs of the learners. Work to support learners through the best available means.

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com)

### Related Research

| Human Capital Management Trends 2012: Managing Talent to Lead Organizational Growth; December 2011 | The 2011 HR Executives Agenda: Automation, Innovation and Growth; December 2010 |
| The Engagement / Performance Equation; July 2011 | Learning & Development 2010: Bridging the Gap Between Strategy and Execution; October 2010 |
| Assessments 2011: Selecting and Developing for the Future; May 2011 | Mobile HCM: Workforce and Talent Management on the Move; June 2010 |

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