Abstract

This paper addresses the challenge of building a business case for the technology needed to support an effective 70:20:10 learning strategy.

It identifies the key elements required to support the “10,” enable the “20” and extend learning into the workplace with the “70.”

It also includes a simple 70:20:10 business case checklist and a 70:20:10 business case template to help you identify what you may need to support 70:20:10 and where potential obstacles may occur. The template includes elements such as assessment of existing costs; potential cost savings; ROI and other models that can be used; benefits supporting organizational speed, agility and sustainability; and other benefits such as L&D capability.

“Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes; but no plans.”

— Peter F. Drucker

About the Author

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Introduction

When organizations adopt the 70:20:10 model, or consider adopting it, one of the first key issues they need to confront is whether they have the technology infrastructure in place to support the new and extended ways of learning that 70:20:10 inevitably requires. If they don’t, then the next key action is to decide what is needed, and to build the business case to put the right technology infrastructure in place.

70:20:10 extends the focus on learning beyond the classroom and e-learning. While structured learning remains important in the 70:20:10 world, the need to embed and support learning in the workplace, together with the need to exploit social and team-based learning are challenges that have not previously been at the forefront of most L&D departments’ strategic agendas.

Extending learning in any form almost always implies the need for technology. The ability to increase scale and reach is extremely difficult without the use of technology in almost any field. Learning is no different.

Learning Technology in a 70:20:10 Learning Strategy

Technology has a key role to extend learning beyond the classroom.

It is almost inconceivable to imagine a robust learning strategy that is not underpinned by technology. The best learning strategies have the “right” technology at their heart. Identifying and implementing the right technology is absolutely critical and needs to be done in a systematic way—thus the need first to create a well-researched and robust business case.

The Road Well Traveled

Today’s Learning Management Systems (LMSs) need to offer far more than their predecessors.

The early LMSs were developed in response to demands of scale. Technology-based solutions were needed to support the rapid increase in structured training as it became a ubiquitous part of almost every mid-to-large sized organization around the world.

Processes and record-keeping systems needed to be automated to deal with the increased scale. The drive for efficiency led to development of a range of financial and people management systems (now called Human Resource Management Systems, or “HRMSs”). LMSs were part of the “first wave” of this shift to technology-based administrative systems. The early LMSs were called “integrated learning systems” and were typified by the management module of the PLATO Computer Aided Instruction System developed at the University of Illinois in 1960. Most LMSs of the past 20 years are recognizable as “children of PLATO.”

These systems were designed to overcome the richness/reach trade-off.1 Before the technology era there was a dichotomy in learning and development. There was a choice that needed to be made between rich, high-quality learning in face-to-face environments and less-rich, often lower-quality learning at a distance. Over time, technology has enabled the distance learning option to become almost as rich as its face-to-face counterpart. Of course, some people will always prefer face-to-face learning but in real-world, cost-constrained environments, technology-enabled solutions can be an equal, if not better, solution.

Today’s LMSs need to be more than automated record-keeping and administrative systems. Any good LMS will provide an integrated environment to support structured learning, social learning and workplace learning.
Building a Learning Technology Business Case

A learning technology business case is fundamental for effective execution of a 70:20:10 strategy.

Every business case for 70:20:10 strategy must include a review of existing learning technology infrastructure, a mapping of technology requirements to future needs, and a set of selection criteria to determine the best-fit technology needed going forward.

A 70:20:10 strategy needs to exploit the best aspects of learning technology, but not be driven by it. Any strategy needs to develop and define a clear vision on what “the future” looks like and then take decisions on specific technologies that will best support that vision.

Key Issues for a 70:20:10 Learning Technology Business Case

The learning technology business case for 70:20:10 must address each of the following issues:

- **Business driven:** Learning technologies must align with the organization’s business drivers, not the other way around. A robust 70:20:10 L&D strategy will have been developed with the key business priorities in mind, and this must be reflected in the learning technology strategy and business case. Priorities will include not only operational excellence and the delivery of business results but also other key business drivers such as talent acquisition and retention strategies, and employee engagement approaches. These attributes will usually be reflected in business strategy, balanced scorecards and, in turn, in HR strategy.

- **IT strategy alignment:** Learning technologies must comply with the overall CIO/IT strategy and plan. This is not to say that L&D should accept what the IT department provides. L&D should be proactive in extending the technology strategy to encompass needed learning technologies. However, alignment and compliance are important elements that must be considered, negotiated and agreed upon.

- **Agility:** Workforces are becoming increasingly agile, flexible and mobile as they respond to changing demands. Learning technologies need to support these characteristics and trends. Any learning technology decision should ask the question, “Will this support ‘anytime, anywhere learning’?”

- **Scalability:** 70:20:10 learning design needs to be scalable and sustainable to leverage across global and extended enterprises. Learning technology infrastructure needs to mirror these attributes. The cost and disruption of swapping out technology solutions are such that it’s important to get decisions right the first time. Of course technology moves on and, at some point, it will be necessary to review solutions and change course. However, the elapsed time between major changes should be longer rather than shorter.

- **Cost efficiency:** Every technology decision needs to deliver clear returns, whether it is core IT infrastructure for business applications or technology to support learning. The business case must make absolutely clear the difference between costs and returns. The pay-back period for the major infrastructure investments is critical. The shorter the time between investment and positive return, the better. This ROI time will be a major factor in investment decision-making.

- **Innovation:** A successful 70:20:10 strategy will rely to some extent on innovative mindsets. The technologies required to deliver the three elements—structured learning, social learning, and workplace learning/support—will inevitably be based on new thinking and approaches. This will include software as a service (SaaS), cloud storage, and delivery to multiple wired, wireless and mobile devices. Social support is a critical element of 70:20:10, as is performance support (requiring access to small pieces of content at the point-of-need or just in advance of the point-of-need).

- **Community building:** The learning technology in a 70:20:10 strategy must have the facility to support the development of learning communities, professional communities, communities of practice, and other community activities. An important part of the business case for technology to support 70:20:10 is its ability to address wider development and performance issues. Learning technologies need to reach beyond supporting the “10” and out into the daily workflow to add value across the organization in an ongoing way.

- **Flexible resource provision:** 70:20:10 relies on a mindset of “resources not courses” as the first response. Courses may provide part of any solution to performance problems, but it is more likely (and constitutes a better approach) that support for the “70” will be the first option to address any performance problem in the workplace. This requires a technology solution that is capable of delivering small “just-in-time” and highly contextual performance support. This may be in the form of micro-learning content (such as quick reference guides, job aids, checklists, short “how to” videos and micro e-learning content of various types), or in the form of conduits to sources of expertise (such as links to experts and expert location tools, professional communities, FAQs, knowledge bases, and wikis).

Learn how Express, a $2 billion clothing retailer, embraced 70:20:10 to engage and develop its workforce.
Specific 70:20:10 Aspects of a Learning Technology Business Case

One approach in developing a 70:20:10 business case is to use a template such as this to respond to the questions that need answers before developing an implementation plan:

1. Why do we need technology to support our 70:20:10 strategy?
2. What business benefits will the technologies we select bring?
3. What is the expected ROI?
4. What risks are mitigated by selecting these technologies?
5. What risks are we introducing?
6. What are the potential resource implications?
7. What are the potential costs?
8. How long will it take to implement our solution?

The Business Case for Technology to Support the “10”

LMS technologies have come a considerable way over the past half-century. The initial focus was on automation of administrative process and improving the efficiency of providing “10” learning solutions. This included course catalogue management, automation of enrollment, resource and room allocation, and tracking activity as well as assuring compliance. The emergence of e-learning resulted in the development of learning content management system (LCMS) functionality and e-learning content launching and tracking. Reference models such as SCORM, and more recently the Experience API (Tin Can) made this easier.

A business case for 70:20:10 learning technology needs to include this suite of functionality. However, the standard LMS technology also needs to support “learning anywhere and on any device.” Mobile learning is increasingly important as the nature of work changes and develops. Other developing approaches in the “10” such as gamification and socially supported and enabled training also need to be considered when building the technology business case.

As organizations continue to migrate significant parts of their classroom curriculum to either e-learning or digital support, this needs to be reflected in the way technology supports the “10.”

Learn more about how informal learning delivers significant benefits.
Start small and build on success.
The Business Case for Technology to Support the “20”

The technology focus on the “20,” social learning and social support, requires a set of solutions different but sometimes linked to those that support the “10.”

The “20” business case for technology should address the requirement for intelligent tutoring and support, the ability to create and support communities, collaborative discussion groups, online coaching and mentoring, and other referential and relational learning activities.²

Social activity is playing an increasingly important role in getting work done. As social media gains a greater foothold in organizational culture, it is important that learning embraces the opportunities of social collaboration as well as social training.³ There is sound evidence to support the business case for the use of both these types of social learning.

“Organizations with strong informal learning capabilities, including social learning, are 300% more likely to excel at global talent development than those without those competencies.”

— Bersin by Deloitte (2012)

The Business Case for Technology to Support the “70”

The “70” in 7:20:10, learning in the workplace through experience, practice and reflection, is a significant potential growth area for learning technology support.

As demands increase on the workforce for higher productivity, often accompanied by lowering of resource levels, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for workers to step away to attend training and development courses. Other structured learning (“10”) solutions such as e-learning and virtual live learning (webinars and online sessions) have to some extent helped address this challenge. However, even these are often now perceived to be too time demanding. People want, and expect, just enough learning, just in time, and they want it delivered in a way that suits them.

“Performance support is a tool or other resource that provides just the right amount of task guidance, support and productivity benefits to the user, precisely at the moment of need.”⁴

The overall business case for performance support in the workplace has always been strong. It should be at the core of a 70:20:10 technology business case.

There is no doubt technology-supported performance support solutions provide increased value. Training (the “10”) is often expensive and difficult to scale. There are many cases where this expense simply can’t be justified, or the scale can’t be achieved. Performance support solutions—from simple checklists or frequently asked questions lists, to video clips, context-sensitive linking and complex electronic performance support systems—all help address the need for scale and speed to performance at an acceptable cost.

Sometimes performance support (part of the “70” solution) can be woven into the “10.” Practice with performance support tools as part of a structured course will help their use back in the workplace. Sometimes performance support is better used as a replacement for the “10.” A business case for technology-enabled performance support is a critical element in an overall 70:20:10 technology business case.
The Business Case for Technology to Support the “100”

One of the fundamentals regarding technology support of the 70:20:10 approach is that a technology, or an integrated suite of technologies, that can support all three elements—structured, social or workplace support—is preferable to a set of disparate technologies drawn together in an ad hoc way.

A principal driver for seeking this type of solution is the added benefit brought by a simple but integrated user interface, common navigation logic, and a “one-stop shop” that supports a rich set of services supporting a wide range of formal and informal learning activities.

When a single technology solution meets all functional requirements and does so in a simple and elegant way, usability is likely to be significantly higher than when a solution is aggregated from a set of disparate parts. The result will also yield higher levels of engagement together with learning and performance gains beyond that which could be expected from an ad hoc collection of individual technology solutions.

Learn more about how Saba’s Learning@Work LMS supports the 70:20:10 model.

References


2. The Aberdeen Group refers to the “20” as comprising referential learning (feedback, coaching and mentoring from managers and/or leaders) and relational learning (learning that takes place in a social context through participation in activities such as communities of practice, knowledge-sharing, collaboration, social networks and other social activities; and is relationship-based).

3. Jane Hart (www.c4lpt.co.uk) makes a clear delineation between social collaboration and social training. “Social training is the use of social technologies to support organized learning events through social communities. Social collaboration is the use of social technologies to support ongoing knowledge sharing and collaborative work in work and project teams, and in communities of practice.”

**70:20:10 Technology Business Case Template**

A business case should be clear, brief and contain only the critical information needed for an assessment of the viability of your plan. It should be supported by key relevant data and your analysis of the decisions you have made on the basis of the data.

Below is a template to use as you build your 70:20:10 technology business case. It includes sections for describing the business problem you are solving; the financial opportunity you are creating; an assessment of existing and future costs and benefits; potential cost savings and other added-value returns; the potential to support organizational speed, agility and sustainability; and other elements.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business opportunity:</td>
<td>Why technology is needed to support our overall 70:20:10 strategy. Why is our existing learning technology infrastructure not adequate? What gaps need to be filled? How will our 70:20:10 technology plan increase our speed to performance, employee engagement and our agility?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial opportunity:</td>
<td>What financial opportunities does our 70:20:10 technology plan create? What are the near-term costs and long-term savings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>What benefits the technologies detailed in this business case will bring to our overall ability to deliver our 70:20:10 strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks:</td>
<td>What risks are we exposing ourselves to by selecting and deploying these technologies? How do we plan to mitigate any identified risks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources:</td>
<td>What are the resource implications for a) planning and deployment phases, and b) operational phase? Do we need any new or specialized resources to support our 70:20:10 technology plan?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability:</td>
<td>What are our plans for sustainability? How will we ensure our solutions are future-proofed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Operations:</td>
<td>How have we assessed the potential impact on day-to-day operations of deploying our 70:20:10 technologies? What plans do we have in place to minimize any disruption?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timelines:</td>
<td>What is our timeline for a) finalizing decisions and obtaining sign-off, and b) commencement and completion of the deployment project? When will we start to see the anticipated benefits?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capability:</td>
<td>Do we have the capability to deliver on this business plan? If there are any shortcomings, how do we plan to address them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependencies:</td>
<td>What dependencies for the successful delivery of our 70:20:10 technology plan have we identified? What steps have we taken to ensure these dependencies are managed and risks minimized?</td>
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# 70:20:10 Technology Business Case Readiness Checklist

This checklist has been designed to be a reflective action tool. Use it to carry out a quick assessment of your organization’s readiness for 70:20:10 in terms of building the technology business case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist Item</th>
<th>Level of Readiness</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> We have a clear understanding of why we need technology to support our overall 70:20:10 strategy.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> We have a clear understanding of how the technologies we select will help us deliver our 70:20:10 strategy.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> We have reviewed the technology market and gathered use case data for the technologies we have selected.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> We have identified the risks we are mitigating by selecting these specific technologies.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> We understand the potential risks we may be introducing by selecting these technologies.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> We have a risk mitigation plan in place to address any risks that we may encounter.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong> We have assessed the potential resource implications of our 70:20:10 technology decisions.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong> We have assessed the potential cost implications of our 70:20:10 technology decisions.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong> We have assessed the time likely to be required to deploy the selected technologies to support our strategy.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10</strong> We have reviewed our technology decisions against our organizational CIO/IT policies.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11</strong> We have reviewed the scalability and future-proofing of our selected 70:20:10 technologies.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12</strong> We have carried out a cost/benefit analysis on the overall technology set we plan to put in place.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong> We have a plan in place to review the performance of our selected technologies against our 70:20:10 strategic objectives at 12 months/24 months/36 months.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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</table>
Saba delivers a cloud-based intelligent learning and talent management solution used by leading organizations worldwide to hire, develop, engage and inspire their people. Saba Cloud's Learning@Work has been specifically designed to support and drive the processes used in deploying a 70:20:10 learning strategy. Including virtual classroom, assessment, social, collaborative, mobile and intelligent capabilities, Learning@Work supports formal, social and experiential learning to deliver more effective and engaging learning campaigns. Saba Cloud is built on a highly scalable platform that exceeds industry security and reliability standards. Saba has more than 31 million users and 2,200 customers across 195 countries and 37 languages. Learn more about intelligent talent management at www.saba.com.

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