# Introduction

Inspire Group's Learning Maturity Model has been created to help businesses better understand their learning culture, with practical steps to progress and improve learning.

Why? Because we believe that better learning is life-changing. And life-changing learning helps your team, and your business, thrive.

As you read this report remember that all models are wrong, but some are useful. So, while it may not describe your exact reality, it could be very useful if we get you closer to it.
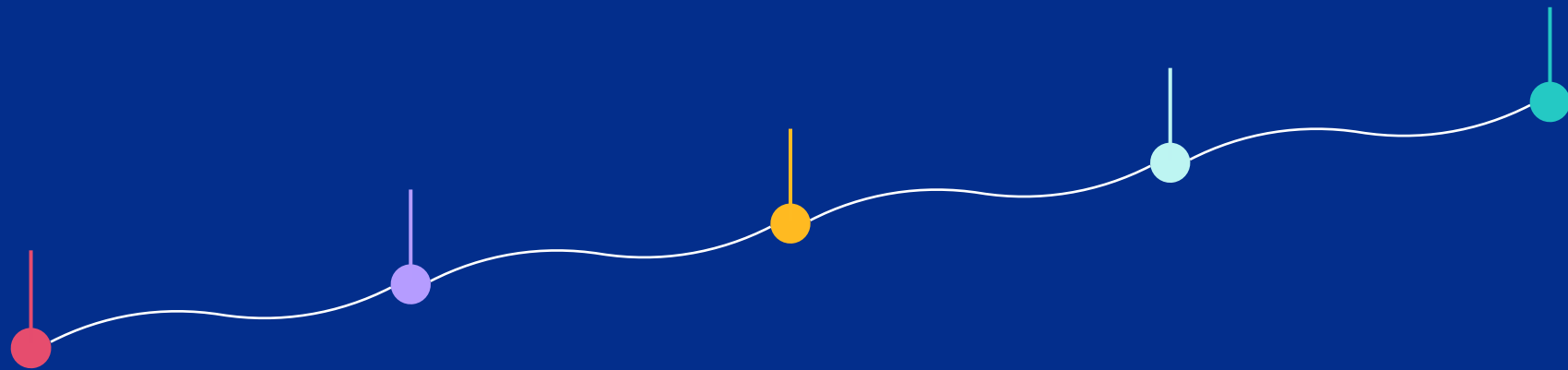
Assessing team maturity vs organisational maturity

When it comes to learning maturity, no team is an island. A single team or division within a company cannot reach the highest maturity levels, integrated and learner-driven stages, while other teams lag behind. Learning maturity also goes beyond one project or stream of work, because any one thing can affect both how learning design gets done, and how learners perceive other learning experiences within the organisation.

Good information, tools and other resources shared across teams are necessary to increase learning maturity, and learner-focused leadership and knowledge sharing must happen at the organisation-wide level.
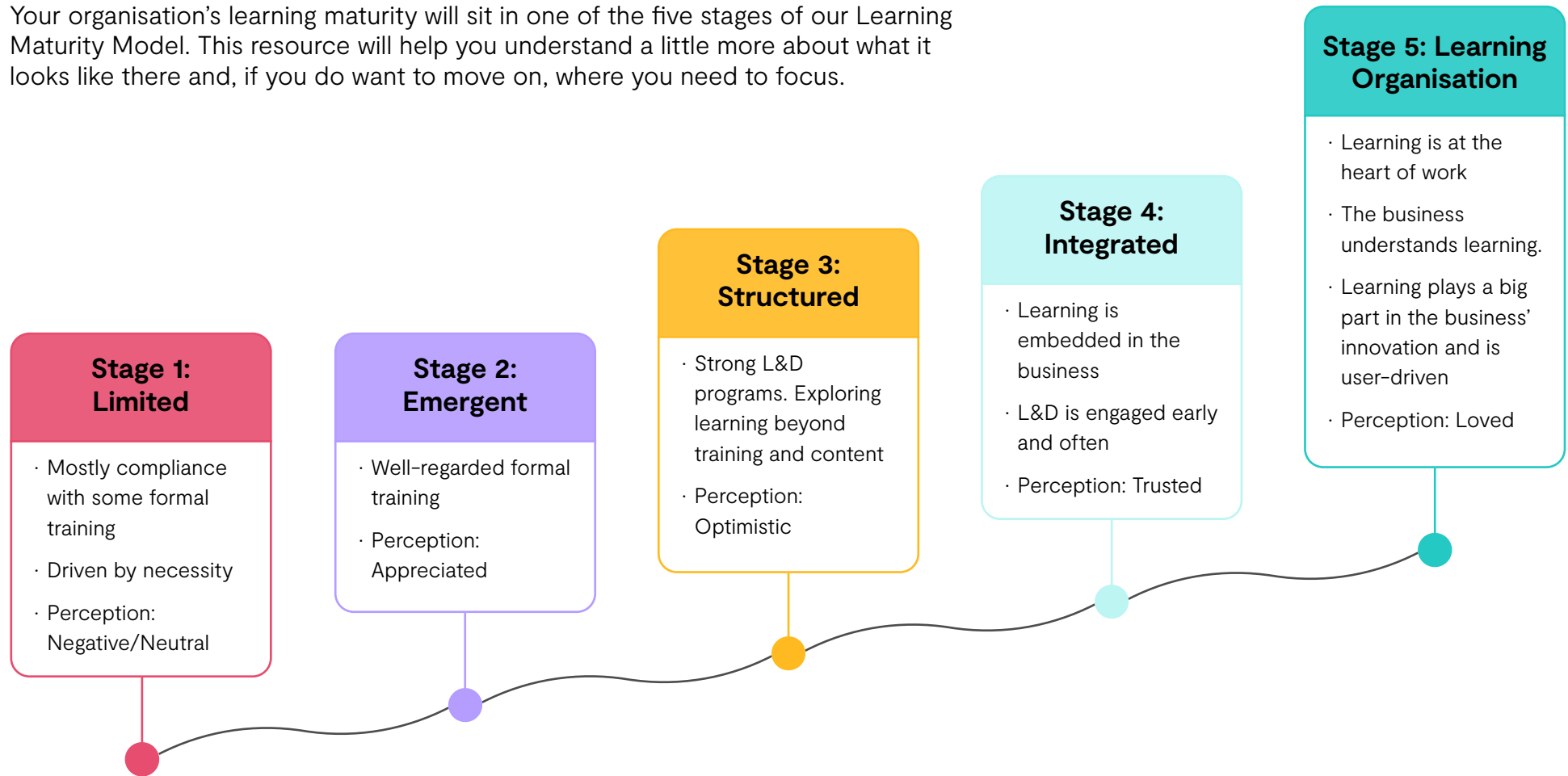
Thus, true learning maturity should be evaluated for an entire organisation rather than for a single team.

That said, individual teams or functional groups can evaluate how learning-mature their individual area is. Looking at their own operations can help them see how they affect the organisation's learning maturity.

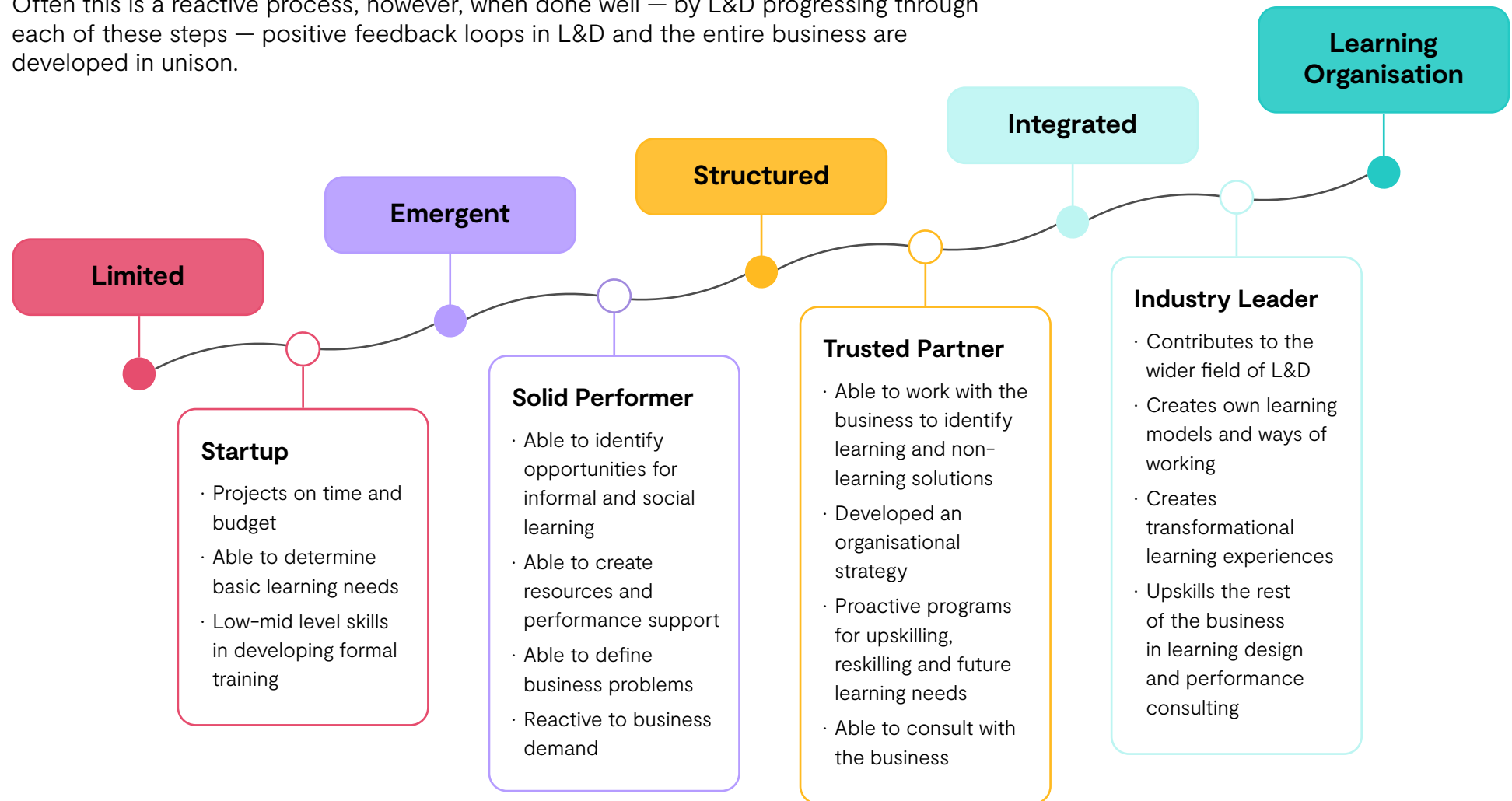# Assessing your organisational learning maturity

Your organisation's learning maturity will sit in one of the five stages of our Learning Maturity Model. This resource will help you understand a little more about what it looks like there and, if you do want to move on, where you need to focus.

Stage 1: Limited

· Mostly compliance with some formal training

· Driven by necessity

· Perception: Negative/Neutral

Stage 2: Emergent

· Well-regarded formal training

· Perception: Appreciated

Stage 3: Structured

· Strong L&D programs. Exploring learning beyond training and content

· Perception: Optimistic

Stage 4: Integrated

· Learning is embedded in the business

· L&D is engaged early and often

· Perception: Trusted

Stage 5: Learning Organisation

· Learning is at the heart of work

· The business understands learning.

· Learning plays a big part in the business' innovation and is user-driven

· Perception: Loved

L&D learning maturity

As the function of learning and development (L&D) matures, so does the organisation's relationship with learning. And as the organisation matures, so must its L&D.

Often this is a reactive process, however, when done well — by L&D progressing through each of these steps — positive feedback loops in L&D and the entire business are developed in unison.

Limited

Emergent

Structured

Integrated

Learning Organisation

Startup

· Projects on time and budget
· Able to determine basic learning needs
· Low–mid level skills in developing formal training

Solid Performer

· Able to identify opportunities for informal and social learning
· Able to create resources and performance support
· Able to define business problems
· Reactive to business demand

Trusted Partner

· Able to work with the business to identify learning and non–learning solutions
· Developed an organisational strategy
· Proactive programs for upskilling, reskilling and future learning needs
· Able to consult with the business

Industry Leader

· Contributes to the wider field of L&D
· Creates own learning models and ways of working
· Creates transformational learning experiences
· Upskills the rest of the business in learning design and performance consulting

Factors in learning maturity

Improving learning maturity requires growth and evolution across four key factors, including:

Process: the systematic use of different learning design methodologies across all projects and the systems in place that allow for the push and pull of learning in a consistent way across the business

Culture: providing leadership, building safety, sharing vulnerability and establishing purpose

Data: intentionally designing learning and non-learning solutions based on data and measuring the outputs to help make strategic decisions

Strategy: identifying business challenges, assessing capability gaps, applying guiding design principles, executing and scaling, measuring business impact, operationalising and integrating.

None of these factors stands alone; rather, they reinforce and enable each other. Knowledge of learning does not create a great learning team if learning is not prioritised by the organisation's leadership; likewise, belief in the value of learning only becomes actionable when there are methodologies in place to 'practise what you preach.' If your L&D team is of inconsistent capability and lacks stakeholder buy-in, for example, this will impact your organisation's learning maturity.
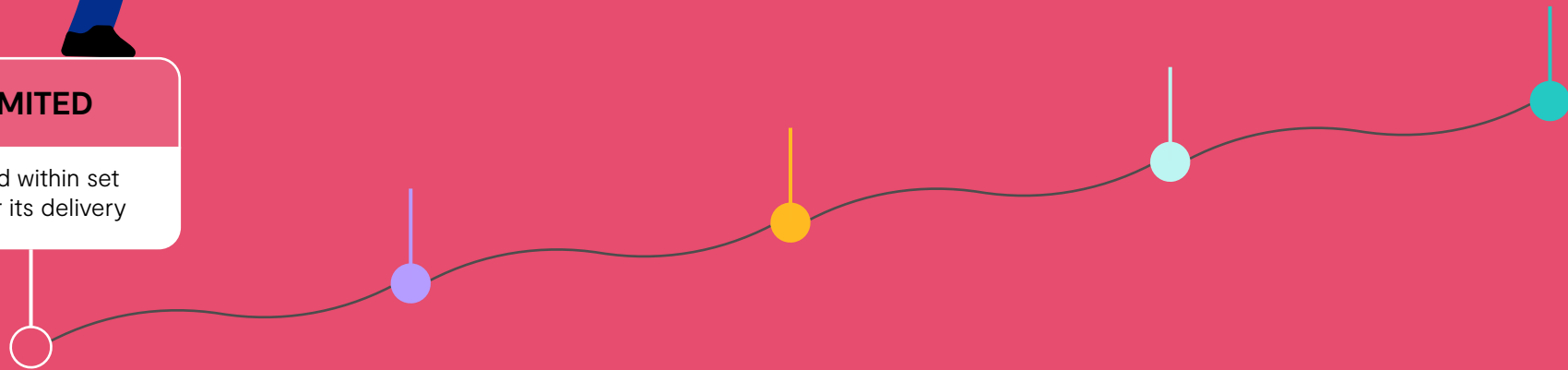
These factors become the levers for progression – and organisations must progress in all of these in order to reach high levels of learning maturity and realise the full value of learner-centred design.

Stage 1: Limited

LIMITED

Confined within set limits for its delivery

Stage 1: Limited

An organisation could be in the **Limited** stage for any number of reasons, but what is true for each in this stage is an erratic approach to their learning. Small efforts are made, usually for one of three reasons:

1. Legal necessity (compliance)

2. A learning-aware individual (maybe a leader) who takes initiative

3. An issue or challenge that has visibility in the business and learning is seen as part of the response.

When Limited in the scope of its learning an organisation might experience:

· some learning awareness and engagement in occasional learning design – though this is often inconsistent in execution and not incorporated into strategy and planning

· projects being delivered on time and within budget

· delivery of compliance training, with some formal training, that is led by content and what people 'need to know' over what they need to be able to do

· memory-based assessments used to define learner understanding of training delivered

· a weak or transactional relationship with wider stakeholders, whose beliefs and expectations are that L&D produce courses, often after all other decisions have been made

· a lack of data being tracked or used within the business, or possibly only to count completion numbers

· a fundamental gap in what learning means and what the organisation wants it to mean

· a small, or limited, budget allocation for learning or a budget that is not systematically allocated or used

· limited systems for people to access learning, communicate learning needs, or ways to analyse and share performance gaps across the business.

Progressing from Limited to Emergent

Organisations that want to move from **Limited** to **Emergent** should focus their efforts on **process.**

It's a lack of process across many key elements within learning that keeps organisations locked in the Limited stage. A focus on process will help to shift away from just responding to training requests with content, to being able to analyse the problem and see if learning is the solution – or if the problem is a result of something else.

You can start by identifying and designing your process for the following:

· Business Challenge to Learning Solution

· Learning Design Methodology

· Ways of Working

· Project Management

· Assessment and Evaluation

· Learning vs Information

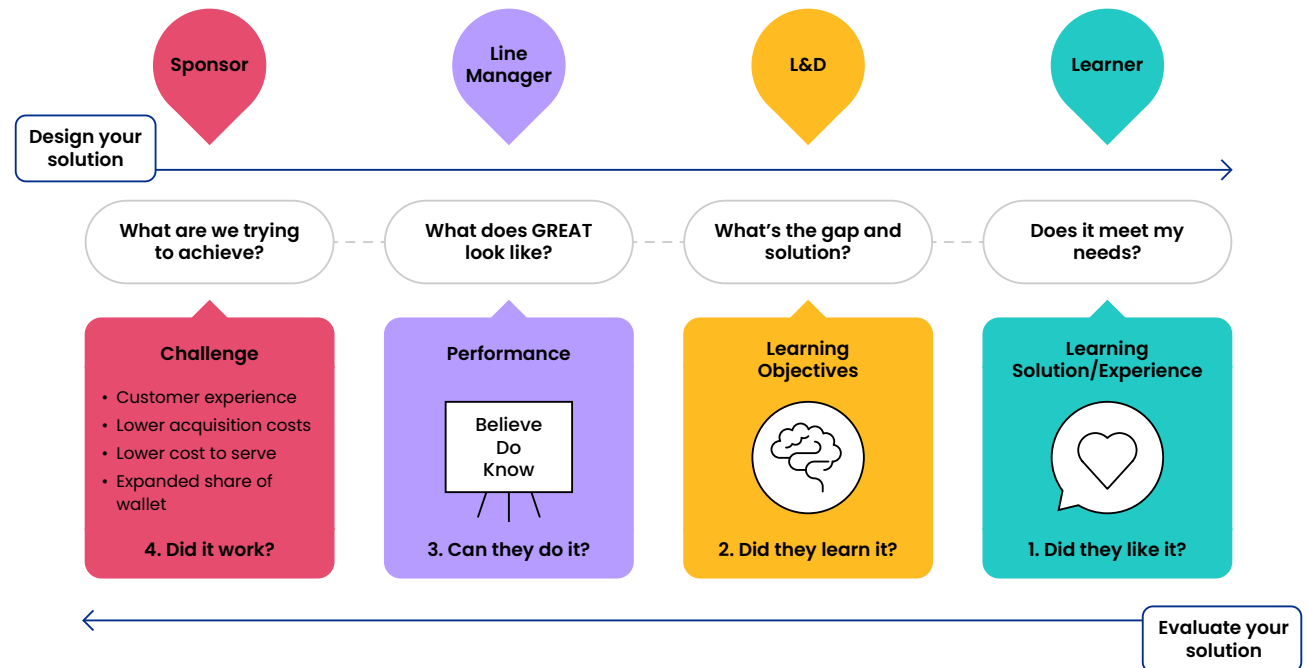· Stakeholder Management

· Learning Skills Pathway

How to create a Business Challenge to Learning Solution process
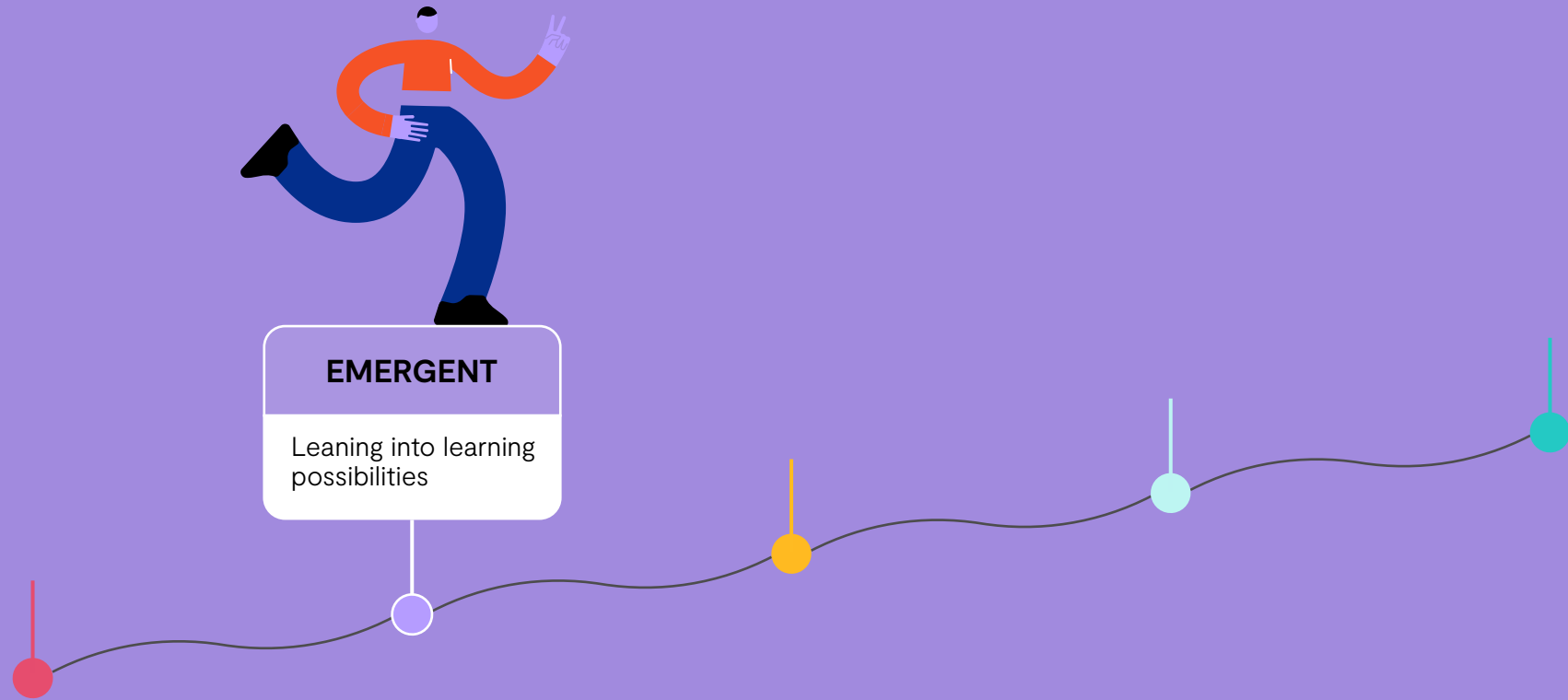
What is it?

This simple design process will help you go from challenge to solution, all on one page. Using it introduces the business to a language for learning that, when embedded, becomes part of the default way of thinking. When used within an L&D function, this process helps to develop consultation skills needed to build into later stages of L&D maturity.

How does it work?

To design your solution, start from the top left and move to the right – which means getting clear on your goal, and how you will measure your success. Once your solution is designed, move from the bottom right to the left to design your assessment and evaluation.

Sponsor

Line Manager

L&D

Learner

Design your solution

What are we trying to achieve?

What does GREAT look like?

What's the gap and solution?

Does it meet my needs?

Challenge
- Customer experience
- Lower acquisition costs
- Lower cost to serve
- Expanded share of wallet

4. Did it work?

Performance

Believe
Do
Know

3. Can they do it?

Learning Objectives

2. Did they learn it?

Learning Solution/Experience

1. Did they like it?

Evaluate your solution

Stage 2: Emergent

EMERGENT

Leaning into learning possibilities

Stage 2: Emergent

When learning maturity is **Emergent,** organisations:

· share learnings across more teams

· engage in some learning-related planning

· may have learning budgets.

When **Emergent** in its learning maturity an organisation might experience:

· efforts being made in some teams to define learning needs and develop formal training opportunities

· positive benefits and results for some teams that apply learning design methods to problems

· learning experience efforts that are small, unstable and based on small initiatives rather than organisational policies

· 'off the shelf' or general learning opportunities rather than tailored to suit specific audiences

· people in learning roles, or performing learning functions, but not nearly enough and not necessarily with the right skills

· a focus on proving the value and impact of learning, but no widespread, systematic learning processes in place

· some leaders buy in and may advocate for learning, but when trade-offs are necessary, learning is still the first to go – or quickly shifts back to content provision as a 'good enough' outcome

· when people get things wrong, a 'but we told them' mindset might be taken rather than exploring why the gap still exists

· learning and growing capability are not yet prioritised as an essential strategy.

Progressing from Emergent to Structured

Organisations that want to move from **Emergent** to **Structured** should focus their efforts on **culture.**

It's a lack of momentum and forward movement across the organisation and between projects and teams that keeps organisations locked in the Emergent stage. A focus on culture will help ensure that learning priorities are given due consideration when trade-offs need to be made.

Your L&D team can help this progression by looking beyond formal learning; finding ways to embed social learning opportunities into the culture. This will come with more consultation across the business, focusing on what people need to be great at their jobs and collecting case studies of positive learning experiences that can be mapped back to business outcomes and performance.

Successful learning cultures focus attention and engagement on the shared goal, by relentlessly telling and retelling their story. The story links present efforts to a meaningful future. These stories all have the same underlying message: 'This is why we work. Here is where you should put your energy.'

How to start building a learning culture

What is it?

Stories help us shift from reporting on the learning 'numbers' to better understanding learning impact and an increase in consultation capability across the business. These stories begin with the work itself.

To progress from this stage, one of the things organisations could do is focus on shifting mindsets by showcasing the work, compiling positive case studies and cultivating relationships with learning advocates in the business so learning can gain traction.

How does it work?

When writing a case study, break it down into three parts:

1 The Need

2 The Solution

3 The Impact

That's it!

Stage 3: Structured

STRUCTURED

Plans and resources are in place to deliver learning

Stage 3: Structured

When learning maturity is **Structured**, the organisation:

· recognises the value of learning

· has established resources to support learning capability

· sees the impact good learning can have.

When Structured in its learning maturity an organisation might experience:

· leadership support of learning and growing capability, sometimes incorporated into high-level strategies

· a centralised definition of learning, generally owned by the L&D function

· a shared, human-centred design process – though this process may not yet be iterative

· politics and miscommunication that may cause a misallocation of resources and overspending on non-scalable solutions such as workshops, leadership programs and content libraries

· the creation of pathways against core skills, with a combination of courses and resources to meet the need

· set L&D standards for what types of requests are considered for learning interventions

· more of a task focus – 'here's something to help you do your job'.

This level is where most organisations that function acceptably land and is as far as many companies will ever go in their learning maturity.

Progressing from Structured to Integrated

Organisations that want to move from **Structured** to **Integrated** should focus their efforts on **data.**

Although learning is respected, understood, and supported, factors other than this are truly driving the business. A focus on data will drive outputs at the highest levels of the organisation and evolve L&D functions into a trusted partner.

Being data-driven means collecting information to assess the extent to which expected outcomes (eg, changes in behaviours, attitudes, or knowledge) have been achieved. The data also tells you what you need more of and less of, for both the present and learning from the past, but also the future.

This data enables organisations to evaluate learning and map it back to business outcomes, making it the primary driver for L&D decisions and supporting the beginnings of an L&D strategy.

Organisations at this level will be creating multiple data feeds beyond the LMS, including KPI measurement and predictive analytics.

How to track the right data

What is it?

Ask the right questions and see what data the answers give you, rather than starting with a predetermined set of skills.

How does it work?

Start by asking the right questions, for example:

· How are things working right now?

· How are they supposed to work?

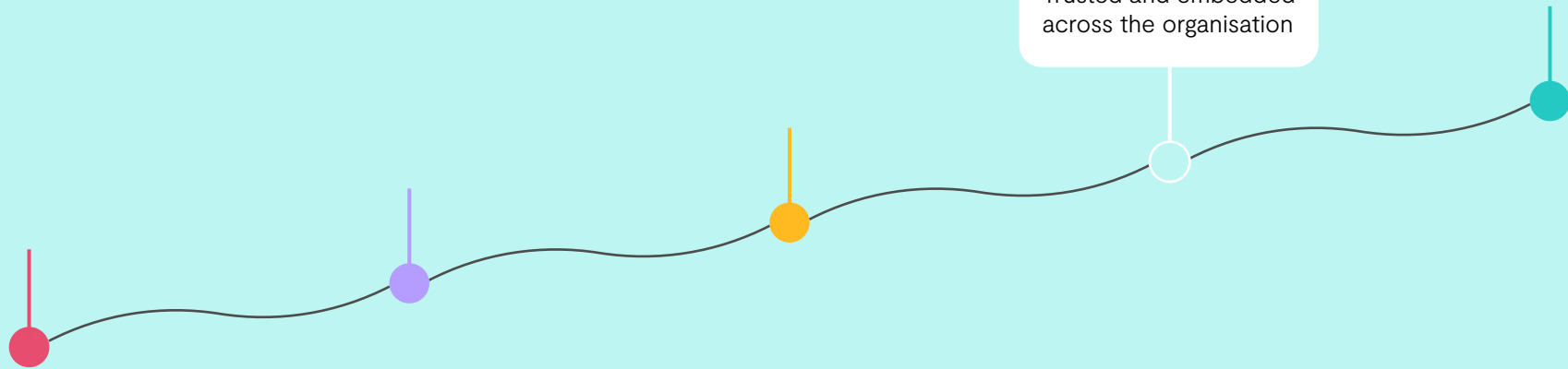· Who is responsible for that work?

· What's getting in the way?

If you can unpack these performance-related questions, you're having a conversation about outcomes which will provide the data to let you know where the problem is, and what role learning can play in solving that problem.

Stage 4: Integrated

INTEGRATED

Trusted and embedded across the organisation

Stage 4: Integrated

Integrated learning maturity is the stage that most organisations should aim to reach. When organisations reach this stage their learning has become:

· comprehensive

· pervasive

· universal.

When Integrated in its learning maturity an organisation might experience:

· almost all teams performing learning-related activities in an efficient, effective manner

· innovation in learning methods and processes and even contributions to the field of learning as a whole

· learning experiences moving away from one-off 'events' but not yet habitual

· important success metrics — that leaders care most about — include a focus on learning or are even driven by learning–related work

· L&D acting in partnership and consulting with the business to identify business needs, and design learning and non–learning solutions to support performance

· the development of a learning strategy that aligns with the business strategy and,based on data, includes upskilling and reskilling future needs of the business

· learning design and learning experiences that are highly effective at serving business goals (at the next level, learning serves not just business goals, but users themselves; but that prioritisation is not always practical, nor sustainable).

Progressing from Integrated to Learning Organisation

Organisations that want to move from Integrated should focus their efforts on **strategy**.

Though teams are using data to help drive decisions and see their benefits at this stage, they still face hidden weaknesses, which can often be traced back to strategy. This might include:

· unsupportive leaders

· tensions with responsibilities and ownership as teams scale

· misalignment of the business strategy with the skills and behaviours required to execute on that strategy

· a focus on catering to a few big projects and stakeholders rather than adhering to a proactive learning strategy

· lack of understanding of what a learning strategy is and how to own it

· a list of goals that are being called a strategy.

L&D can support this progression by upskilling the rest of the business on what good learning and performance consulting looks like, and by empowering the business to create their own transformative learning experiences.

How to create a learning strategy

What is it?

Creating a proactive learning strategy that aligns with the business strategy (please note you need to have a strategy for this to work – not just a set of goals).

A good strategy honestly acknowledges the challenges being faced and provides an approach to overcoming them. And the greater the challenge, the more a strategy focuses and coordinates efforts to achieve a powerful competitive punch or problem-solving effect.

How does it work?

This simple practical model is from the awesomeness that is the *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* book by Richard P. Rumelt.

1. The Diagnosis

A diagnosis that defines or explains the nature of the challenge, rather than simply naming a performance goal. A good diagnosis simplifies the often-overwhelming complexity of reality by identifying certain aspects of the situation as critical. Use data for where to focus.

2. A Guiding Policy

This is an overall approach chosen to cope with or overcome the obstacles identified in the diagnosis. They define a method of grappling with the situation and ruling out a vast array of possible actions.

3. Action Plan

A set of coherent actions that are designed to carry out the guiding policy. These are steps that are coordinated with one another to work together in overcoming obstacles through the lens of lifting performance.
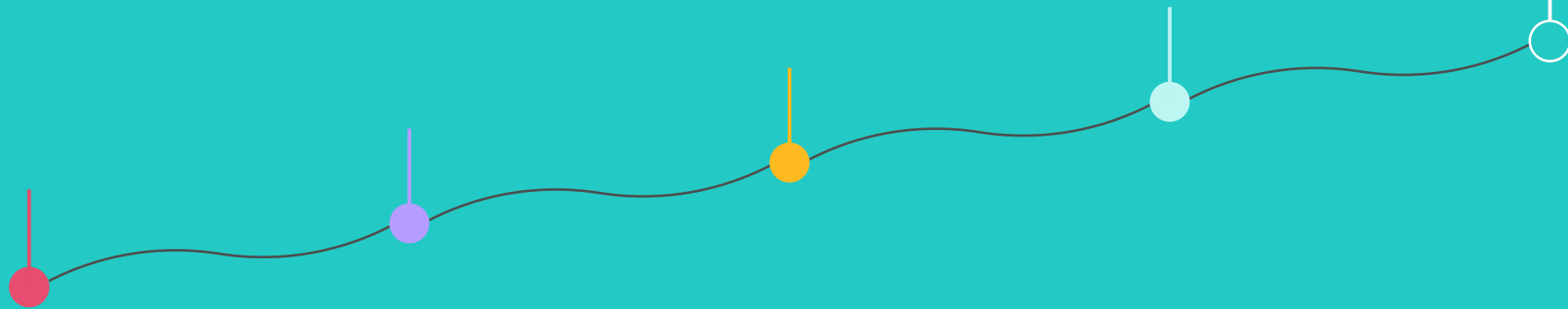
In business, the challenge is usually dealing with change and competition.

Stage 5: Learning Organisation

LEARNING ORGANISATION

Learning is a fundamental norm

Stage 5: Learning Organisation

Learning in a **Learning Organisation** is:

· part of the norm

· habitual

· reproducible

· loved.

Few companies operate at this stage, but those that do will experience:

· learning that is integrated into workflows and operations

· data being primary driver of the organisation's decision making and strategy

· a systemic approach to skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge

· the acquisition of new knowledge and skills transferred into new ways of behaviour and habits that are integrated into the culture of the business

· a mindset that enables the organisation to see the value of productive failure as contrasted with unproductive success

· learning that fundamentally changes you as a person, outside of what you do.

Remaining in the Learning Organisation maturity

While this stage is the ultimate learning maturity goal, it is difficult to achieve and tough to maintain for long durations before issues arise (resource bloat, conflicting goals, or new senior leaders arrive with a different mindset) and maturity regresses.

Fundamentally, it's a combination of all the levers that will help maintain momentum.

Organisations seeking to maintain their Learning Organisation maturity might also:

· introduce new design methodologies and ways of working into the business

· ensure Talent and L&D work together to strategise against which skills are in demand and which are abundant, resulting in a malleable plan for targeted learning

· build safety by reframing what failure means within the culture.

How to build safety through framing failure

A Learning Organisation must see failure not as something to hide, but as something that is a natural by-product of experimentation. When a culture reframes failure as a feature, not a bug, of learning then further evolution is inevitable.

We must change the self-limiting belief that effective performers don't fail.

Design productive responses to different types of failure

According to Amy Edmondson, a leadership and management professor at Harvard Business School, there are three distinct types of failure we should design different responses for.

Preventable failure

A failure that you had the knowledge and ability to prevent. Deviance, inattention, or lack of ability is usually the reason.

Possible responses:

· Relevant, practical 'as and when' learning

· Learning refreshers

· Process improvement

· System redesign

· Sanctions, if repeated or otherwise blameworthy actions are found

Complex failure

Can also be understood as unavoidable failures, where there's enough volatility or complexity in the environment that things just happen.

Possible responses:

· Failure analysis from diverse perspectives

· Identification of risk factors to address

· System improvement

Intellectual failure

Occurs when experimentation is necessary, eg, answers are not knowable because this exact situation hasn't been encountered before and perhaps never will be again.

Possible responses

· Failure parties

· Failure awards

· Thoughtful analysis of results to figure out implications

· Brainstorming of new hypotheses

· Design of next steps or additional experiments

Next steps

Based on your questionnaire results, the purpose of this report is to provide you with a snapshot of where your organisation currently is in the maturity model and provide some guidance on the levers that are best used to progress to the next stage.

A complete evaluation of your organisation's learning maturity should be based on diverse assessment methods to thoroughly understand current learning projects and output, including observation of and interviews about work practices, analysis of processes, people and tools, assessment of deliverables and surveys of people from across the organisation.

If you need a hand in designing what this progress could look like across learning, email lmm@inspiregroup.com.au and we can help get you started.