



# LEARNING STRATEGY GUIDE

The Nature of Learning

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# THE JAVELIN INSTITUTE

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## FOREWARD

The purpose of this Learning Strategy Guide is to share a learning philosophy and explain why learning is critically important to leaders. While many of the concepts in this guide touched on by subject matter experts, this publication seeks to compile today's best practices in a consolidated format and provide them for aspirational goal setting. Learning is an institutional priority and a professional expectation for all. This mentality is key to becoming a more effective leader leading learning organizations.

The most important factor in this Learning Strategy Guide is the importance of continuous learning throughout your career. Continuous learning is essential to maneuver life because it enables leaders to quickly recognize changing conditions in the marketplace, adapt, and make timely decisions against a thinking competitor. The skills required in business must be learned, developed, and honed over time – if neglected, they quickly atrophy. Leaders leverage the art and science of learning, technologies, and learning environments that reflect the changing operational environment to tailor learning and provide each other with constructive feedback. Leaders hold other leaders to high professional standards of performance, conduct, and discipline – to include learning. As leaders rise in roles and responsibilities, continuous learning and developing our professional skills are a leader's expectation. We must make the most of every learning opportunity, fostering our stakeholders' learning while continuing our own.

Continuous learning is important to leaders because of the fundamental nature of business and its ever-changing character. The nature of business carries a combination of fear, uncertainty, ambiguity, chance, horror and, above all, friction that leaders must prepare to counter and overcome. Leaders must seek out education and training opportunities that simulate these conditions. We must train how we lead. As leaders, we must understand how important learning is and be committed to the principles laid out in this Learning Strategy Guide. Our professional responsibility – as leaders – is to engage in continuous learning so that we may best support our fellow leaders, our stakeholders, the organizations we serve, and the communities in which we live.

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# LEARNING

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## Chapter 1 | The Nature of Learning

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*The Javelin Institute's' learning philosophy seeks to create a culture of continuous learning and professional competence that yields adaptive leaders capable of successfully conducting change in complex, uncertain, and chaotic environments. Learning is developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes through study, experience, or instruction. Learning includes both training and education.*

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The Javelin Institute, as an organization dedicated to creating leadership-readiness, must prepare leaders with the versatility and flexibility to effectively lead - and succeed - in any situation and at any intensity across the full spectrum of business, whenever and wherever life's duty calls. To meet these demands, it is critical that leaders recognize that learning has a direct impact on leading. Leaders who understand the key learning principles and continuously seek opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and the proper attitudes throughout their careers will develop wisdom that enables success in business. As leaders, we pass on our wisdom and experiences to the next generation of leaders. For the Javelin Institute to remain in service in creating leadership-readiness, it is critical that every leader we work with strengthen and value learning in all facets of their culture, learning environments, and leadership development. Learning is a professional responsibility for all leaders at all levels. Leaders must develop the habit of continuous learning early in their careers to set the conditions for success in increasing levels of responsibility.

### Learning and Competence

Learning is developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes through study, experience, or instruction. It is a never-ending progression that includes understanding why something is important—the intent of learning. Learning is much more than gathering information or reciting facts; it includes cognitive, physical, social, emotional, ethical, and cultural components. Learning occurs in formal settings (e.g., a classroom or training exercise) and informal settings (e.g., such as social, experiential, self-directed, and other ways outside of the classroom). The developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes interact to influence how leaders think, respond, and act.

Learning encompasses both training and education, which are equally important and complementary. A simple explanation of the differences between training and education is that training prepares leaders to deal with the known factors of business (e.g., the importance of good salesmanship), while education prepares leaders to deal with the unknown factors (e.g., effective decision-making in changing circumstances). Training and education are accomplished in different ways, but they are both required—working together—to instill the learning that results in readiness and effectiveness.

The complexity of the modern leadership landscape and increasing rate of change requires a highly educated force. While different, education and training are inextricably linked. Education denotes study and intellectual development. Training is primarily learning-by-doing. We will not

train without the presence of education; we must not educate without the complementary execution of well-conceived training.

Leaders must always seek better ways to learn throughout the entire continuum of training and education. Throughout this publication, the term, learning is emphasized; training and education are used when specifically referring to one or the other. Learning is the overall intended outcome of both training and education.

Leaders continuously learn to be ready for the constantly changing and increasing demands of business, and the range of situations present. As a Javelin Institute tenet explains, “We earn the trust of others by demonstrating competence, a sense of responsibility, loyalty, and self-discipline.” Competence is having sufficient knowledge, judgment, and skills to perform a particular duty, job, or function. Leaders improve competencies through formal and informal learning opportunities that develop the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Leaders learn to address complex problems and develop teamwork wherever they may be, whether in the board room, at client locations, or in formal learning centers. Learning enables leaders to think critically, develop judgment, and cultivate a bias for action without waiting to be told what to do. A leader with knowledge and skills who lacks judgment requires close supervision, which may not be possible in business conditions. Our Javelin ethos demands competence, responsibility, loyalty, and self-discipline as professionals charged with the defense of the business. Learning prepares leaders to exercise initiative within the prevailing leader’s intent—constantly seeking to improve, develop mental agility, and deal with changing situations.

### The Role of Learning in Competition

Maneuvering amongst competition requires intelligent leaders at all levels who possess a bias for intelligent action. Success in competition depends on leaders developing an intellectual edge to accurately recognize cues, quickly make sense of information, and respond effectively. This intellectual edge is based on developed knowledge and experience that allows leaders to shape conditions and events to their advantage. Developing fundamental cognitive competencies such as problem framing, mental imaging, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, reasoning, and problem solving enables leaders to make effective decisions more quickly in time-constrained operational environments, when they often have incomplete, inaccurate, or even contradictory information.

A central tenet of maneuvering amongst competition is attacking the competitor’s ability to make decisions and to shift the mental aspects of leadership to your advantage. In short, leaders develop an intellectual edge by learning cognitive skills and competencies that enable them to move through the observe, orient, decide, and act cycle (often referred to as the OODA loop), more quickly and effectively than a competitor. The leader who recognizes what is happening, adapts to the situation, and then makes effective decisions in the shortest amount of time will typically have an advantage. The OODA loop decision-making cycle is even more important in preparation for future competitors because as new technologies emerge the rate of change will continue to increase. Therefore, leaders must continuously improve their knowledge and skills by leveraging technology—but never depend upon technology alone as the solution. Leaders

should observe their environment to recognize key cues, synthesize these cues to orient and quickly make sense of the information in order to decide and act—and then leaders will start the cycle again as they observe the effects of their actions. Importantly, action includes leaders effectively communicating decisions to their stakeholders. Leaders use skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, viewing situations from multiple perspectives, and visualizing the battlespace in nonlinear terms to determine the best course of action within operational and tactical time constraints.

Through progressive learning and experience, leaders at all levels develop a bias for action enabled by adaptive, rapid decision-making. The more leaders learn and exercise this bias for action, the better it becomes. Although case studies, simulations or training exercises approximate the conditions of business, leaders cannot fully replicate the dangers, complexity, emotions, and friction of actual real-world business situations. Leaders experience a variety of training situations that approximate business situations so that learned experiences can be remembered and applied during the stresses and friction of reality. Through both direct and indirect experiences, Leaders develop a realistic appreciation for what is possible in business and what is not. The following Case Study, based upon a composite of leaders' experiences during a business situation, illustrates the importance of learning from previous experiences and adapting to changing conditions.

Leaders need to develop memory skills because leaders – as human beings – increasingly tend to digitally store and search for information rather than committing the information to short-term or long-term memory. Leaders cannot always rely on technologies or on being able to digitally search for information during competition due to many reasons, such as time constraints, lack of network access, or the need to minimize electronic signatures. Therefore, leaders at all levels need to train their minds to memorize and recall important information, to reflect upon that knowledge to develop understanding, and to frequently exercise these skills through training so that information can be recalled instinctively during business situations as they arise.

### Case Study

*A Chief Revenue Office (CRO) recognized in the first few days of an initiative that a competitor was already anticipating and countering the organization's tactics. After assessing the information about the competitor's actions from several of the sales division heads, the CRO concluded that the unit needed improved mobility and funding to outmaneuver the competitor. The CRO spoke with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and recommended attaching a marketing representative from the organization's marketing department to work directly with the sales company representatives in the field, providing a highly mobile force with increased mobility to augment the competitors advances. The CEO task-organized the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) to provide additional marketing representatives for close-in operations in the area's considered key targets. This created an entirely different tactical plan for the company based upon observing the competitor's behaviors, adapting, and quickly learning from sales representatives' experiences.*

*The highly mobile elements of the organization began to appear unexpectedly, surprising the competitor who believed they were attacking only non-key client target organizations. As the*

*competitor attempted to adjust to the new leadership tactics, the CRO continued to learn and adapt, making adjustments accordingly. For example, when the competitor began trying to set sales appointments for key target organizations, the competitor would instead encounter well-planned and orchestrated appointments already established by the incumbent at critical junctions and timeframes throughout the month. The company's sales and marketing representatives continued to appear at critical key target locations again and again, repeatedly catching the competitor off guard and defeating their tactics.*

*From the perspective of the competitor, the organization's sales team had become an overwhelming, omniscient, and omnipresent unit coupled with their marketing cohorts – and the competitor ended all operations in the area. The actual situation was not sales nor marketing omnipresence, but rather an attentive and learning-focused leader who observed the competitor's behaviors, quickly learned to identify key cues and recognize patterns, and continuously developed new ways to adapt the company's tactics—to outthink and overwhelm an competitor who failed to do the same. The company repeatedly put the competitor "on the horns" of a dilemma, convincing the competitor that success could not be achieved in the company's area of operations.*

## Key Principles of Learning

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### *Learning Principles for Leaders*

*Know yourself and seek self-improvement.*

*Be ready and willing to learn.*

*Understand why you are learning.*

*Provide and receive constructive feedback.*

*Learning is purpose-driven to develop professional competence.*

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Projected future challenges for the leaders include the potential for competitors to achieve technological equivalence or superiority. That possibility, coupled with leaders' expeditionary nature, means that leaders must be a more lethal, thinking force that fosters continuous personal and organizational learning based upon enduring principles.

The first learning principle is *know yourself and seek self-improvement*. A leader's mindset, values, ethics, and experiences impact his or her learning, decisions, and actions. "Character, will, and intellect, they're interrelated, and they're inextricably linked. Now character is about moral character, and it's . . . about the capacity and the sense of the rightness of your decision: to be able to make that decision quickly. The will is about having the strength to execute the decision, and the intellect underlies it by giving you the capacity, the intellectual capacity, to be able to make the



*decision.*” When leaders are aware of how perspectives and experiences shape their thinking, they can better identify assumptions, biases, and other factors that influence learning. Previous experiences are valuable for many reasons, such as providing personalized references to integrate new knowledge, skills, and experiences into memory. Leaders learn and compete effectively despite friction, which has been described as “*the force [in business] that makes the apparently easy so difficult.*” Learning is not always easy; a lack of self-awareness, emotional regulation, humility, time management, or biases can cause friction that makes learning more difficult. Leaders overcome this friction and seek self-improvement by better understanding themselves—particularly how our values, ethics, and perspectives influence learning.

The second learning principle is *be ready and willing to learn*. Leaders have a professional responsibility to learn throughout their careers and should always seek opportunities to learn. Leaders must take an active role in learning, be intellectually curious, and look for new ways to adapt what they have learned to other relevant situations. There are many factors that indicate a person’s willingness and readiness to learn, such as physical, behavioral, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Additionally, humility, courage, integrity, perseverance, motivation, and discipline are other key qualities that affect learning readiness. Leaders increase their learning readiness by having the courage, perseverance, and discipline to continuously seek new professional knowledge, skills, and experiences. A leader’s learning can be facilitated by developing an awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes. Leaders sharpen their intellect by studying how to think better and then applying these skills to improve as learners, leaders, and decision makers.

The third learning principle is to *understand why you are learning*. When leaders understand why they are learning concepts and skills, they better understand the importance of learning to the objective and are more motivated to learn. By understanding the context of learning, leaders are better able to apply concepts and skills to new situations, increasing their competence and adaptability. Unknowns, uncertainty, and disorder will never be eliminated in battle – information may be unclear, misinterpreted, influenced by the competition, or communications systems may fail. When leaders understand why they are learning, it enables them to focus on learning the known and adapting to the unfamiliar more quickly and effectively than the competition. Out-learning the competition is, therefore, the key to out-fighting the competition and winning.

The fourth learning principle is to *provide and receive constructive feedback*. One cannot learn without feedback—it is critical to learning and developing adaptability. There are two sources of feedback: *intrinsic sources* (i.e., internal) and *extrinsic sources* (i.e., external). For example, a leader’s own perception that he or she made a bad decision, then adjusting the decision on the next occurrence, would be an example of using intrinsic feedback. In this same example, extrinsic feedback would be a stakeholder identifying the error to the leader, then demonstrating the proper decision. Both intrinsic and extrinsic feedback are important for learning and developing adaptability. Adaptability is the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions. Leaders develop adaptability when they examine a situation, recognize what is happening, and adjust their response to the new conditions. The process of learning is itself a form of adaptive behavior and is an essential element of business effectiveness. Leaders adapt to the operational environment, to changes in their assigned mission, to the competition’s adaptive tactics, and to changes in the business landscape. Seeking and responding to feedback

are critical to effective adaptation. All leaders can learn to become more adaptive through training, education, and self-study.

The final principle is that *learning is purpose-driven to develop professional competence*. Learning has specific goals and measurable objectives to gauge progress toward developing competencies. Leadership learning is team-oriented so that leaders develop the skills and connections to work collectively, usually as part of a cohort. Leaders are challenged with problems that they tackle as teams in order to learn by doing (i.e., experiential learning) as well as from each other. Leadership learning is focused on developing professional competence – developing ready leaders and stakeholders capable of operating effectively in changing conditions. Additionally, leaders study history and world events to be more prepared to respond to new challenges, such as the increase in globalization and competition for resources. Effective leaders at the front adapt to fluid changes in circumstances in order to deal with complex problems and to proactively shape events for an advantage. Leaders sometimes conceptualize the competition as a single person or group of people but should be viewed as a complex system. Leaders must understand that the enemy and/or adversary may be comprised of many people, systems, and networks, founded on different ideologies. Through purpose-driven learning, leaders develop a variety of competencies to better understand and respond to complex competitor or business systems. Learning environments that simulate these complex systems develop leaders' professional competence and encourage adaptation, as well as the ability to outthink competitors in changing situations.

### **The Human Dimension and Science of Learning**

Conflict is a human phenomenon; understanding human nature helps leaders to understand conflict. Leaders prepare for the complexities of each conflict by studying social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors. These factors often exert a greater influence on the character and outcome of business than other factors, such as the size of the competitor workforces or their product/service offerings. Leaders learn as much as possible about the different human factors, cultures, perspectives, and ideas that impact operations. Developing self-awareness of the personal factors that can detract from learning, such as hubris (i.e., ego) and bias, enables leaders to overcome friction. Leaders strive to view situations and information objectively and unemotionally, provide candid feedback to each other, and learn to overcome or mitigate factors that negatively impact preparedness.

Ambiguity and loss will always be parts of business. Learning to compete in dangerous conditions despite fear and uncertainty is key to business. Leadership at all levels must understand how the body and mind respond to fear and stress so that they better control their responses in any situation, including competitive moments. Leaders learn how to effectively control stress reactions and fight in dangerous conditions through realistic training, increasing self-awareness, understanding the attributes of competitors, and increasing mental and physical resilience. For example, leaders that learn breathing techniques during daily routines tend to better control how their body's nervous system responds to stress in order to think more clearly and produce positive results. The breathing techniques help leaders to control their heart rate, respiration, attention, and muscles under stress, which then increases the accuracy of their focus. Competition can challenge stakeholder cohesion and present leaders with a variety of

moral and ethical dilemmas. Leaders develop strong mental, moral, spiritual, and ethical understanding because they are as important as physical skills when operating in the sometime volatile competitive business environment.

The science of learning encompasses many disciplines, such as neuroscience, psychology, and andragogy (adult learning). The human brain is a constantly reorganizing system capable of being shaped and reshaped across an entire lifespan. Each new learning event impacts the brain, regardless of the leader's age, rank, or level of experience. Therefore, all leaders should understand that challenging experiences enhance the brain and better hone their competitive capability. Science has also identified that individuals and teams have differences in the way they learn, with varying sensory preferences for learning, competencies, and strengths. These differences are essential components of the learning process and can be useful knowledge for structuring or engaging in learning events so that learning is more effective. Prior experiences, knowledge, competencies, and perspectives are all unique elements that form the basis for understanding new information. Leaders form relevant connections between new information and their prior knowledge. Adult learning involves adapting or modifying the prior relevant information to the specific situation or problem that the leaders seeks to resolve. Understanding the human dimension and science of learning enables leaders to tailor training and education to more effectively build competencies, learn from mistakes, provide effective feedback, and sustain learning.

An effective way that leaders can accelerate their learning is by indirectly learning from others through vicarious experience. Vicarious experiences are relevant learning opportunities that each leader obtains by observing, reading, and studying what others have experienced. For example, leaders obtain vicarious experiences from observing others in their organization performing a task during an exercise, participating in after action reviews, reading lessons learned reports, or studying history. There is no excuse for not learning from others.

The science of learning, combined with the art of learning, helps to develop well-trained and educated leaders and well-trained and combat ready organizations. Each leader must learn how to learn, both independently and collectively in teams. Social and interpersonal factors, such as effective communication, group cohesion, and trust, all influence learning. When these factors are positive, they facilitate the learning process and create strong relationships. Leaders should actively seek to understand human and environmental factors that influence learning while avoiding thoughts and behaviors that can negatively affect learning and cohesion. This knowledge of the human dimension of learning and their own experiences lead leaders to develop wisdom that facilitates effective decision-making, which is often the determining factor in business.

### Problem Solving as a Warfighting Capability

Time spent learning how to effectively think and solve problems is time well invested. Leaders must build the skills to recognize potential problems, reason, and think critically. Reasoning is the process of thinking about something in a logical way to form a conclusion or judgement.

Critical thinking is the reflective part of that reasoning. Critical thinking skills include inference, evaluation, interpretation, and explanation. Developing these skills enables leaders to understand not only the information presented, but also its potential implications and secondary effects. Through reasoning and critical thinking, leaders explore, question, and understand the key factors affecting the situation, which then enables leaders to develop better courses of action.

As leaders, we continuously seek and use information to solve problems. As information becomes more ubiquitous, it is increasingly challenging to determine how and what to focus on in order to make sense of information. The more often that leaders identify key cues and information during positive business experiences, the more quickly that leaders are able to decide and act when deployed. Although each leader views the world and problems through his or her unique perspective, every leader develops common problem-solving skills. Quickly recognizing and addressing potential problems enables leaders to better deal with disruption and respond to changes in the competitive situation. With deliberate practice, leaders improve key skills such as recognizing patterns, filtering important information, critical thinking, and reasoning. The future competitive environment will contain increasingly difficult problems that do not necessarily have a “right” answer. Therefore, leaders’ skills to observe objectively, reason effectively, take decisive action, and then adjust as needed remain key elements of success.

### The Mind as a Weapon

The philosophy of maneuver warfare guides much of what leaders do—it is their way of thinking about and preparing for business with the intended purpose of taking decisive action against the competition at the least cost to themselves and their organizations. Leaders study and apply business competition in order to better exploit advantages in multiple domains and create rapidly unfolding situations in business that overwhelm the competition. Business competition requires that leaders develop the temperament to persevere amidst uncertainty and the mental agility to succeed in fluid and chaotic situations. Additionally, it requires being able to understand the dynamic and complex situation from multiple perspectives to determine how to exploit an advantage. Decentralized execution within the leader’s intent is central to business competition; this requires that each leader understand the situation and execute actions to support and achieve that intent.

Regardless of technology and equipment, leaders are ready to compete and win. Therefore, it is essential that leaders develop and maintain an intellectual edge over any competitor by developing their minds; just as they would prepare any other business practice for competing. This intellectual edge must come from self-disciplined study and deliberate practice as leaders build competencies in the profession of business – as individuals, teams, organizations, and communities.

### Continuous Learners

Developing the mind as a weapon is a career-long process. Leaders are continuous learners—they pursue mastery in the profession of business, recognizing that the achievement of mastery is a journey, not a destination. As adult learners, leaders recognize that they are responsible for

their own learning outcomes, actions, and decisions. Leaders continuously seek to build their expertise and understand the context of what they are learning so that they can apply it effectively in new situations. Leaders leverage their own unique personal experiences, as well as the experiences of others, as foundations to increase their understanding.

As adult learners, leaders need to know why content is relevant during both training and educational activities. Leaders perceive learning as a progression of goals to build competencies, not a single discrete goal. Therefore, leaders benefit most from information and learning activities presented in the context of real-life situations or task-specific problems. Tactical decision exercises, competition crushing role plays, and case studies are examples of effective learning methods for leaders—they situate the learning concepts within the context of business and illustrate why the content is relevant. Leaders make sense of the information and build mental connections between their personal and vicarious experiences. As a result, leaders build individual and collective knowledge over time that enables them to understand different situations and other peoples' perspectives, informing how to accomplish objectives in changing situations.

To become better operators, leaders continuously gather information and engage in activities that test their assumptions, develop new knowledge, increase critical thinking and reasoning, and build deeper understanding. Instead of simply asking what happened in a business situation, leaders should always ask and seek to better understand why the events happened, and consequently what to apply for future situations. Leaders must learn about a broad range of topics and skills through professional reading, experiential learning, and deliberate practice. Leaders must also approach each event and interaction as a learning opportunity. There is always something to learn; even if that something is what not to do in the future. As continuous learners, leaders actively seek, apply, and share lessons learned to develop themselves and other stakeholders in the profession of leadership.

## Conclusion

Leaders learn the concept of every leader a steward early in their careers. As leaders prepare for the complexities and volatility of future operating environments, they also recognize that – for effective leadership – every leader must also be a continuous learner. Leaders continuously build and hone the skills needed to fight their organization's battles, wherever and whenever they may occur. Leaders are the business' expeditionary force-in-readiness – and are career-long students of the profession of leadership. Leaders leverage the human dimension and science of learning in training and education. Leaders learn in the classroom, learn in the field, learn in everyday life, and learn through competition. Leaders adapt every tool that they have – technology, equipment, and their minds—to succeed and win in preferably every situation and place. Leaders must develop and demonstrate brilliance in the basic fundamental skills, combined with the mental agility to adapt to whatever situation they face. The Javelin Institute provides a thinking force that constantly strives to improve and is never finished providing learning. To continuously improve, leaders take a focused, self-disciplined approach to career-long learning and instills a culture of learning throughout their careers in the organizations and clients they serve.