

NARRATIVES AND NUMBERS:

7 steps to proving
Learning and Development's value



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About the author

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Neil John Cunningham has dedicated 13 years to transforming Learning & Development (L&D) teams from optional add-ons to essential components of business strategy.

From small 30 person start-ups to 24,000 person global enterprises, Neil has seen the common challenges faced by L&D leaders.

One such challenge is effectively communicating the value of L&D through a compelling data story.

In this book, Neil aims to guide you through how to do this.

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction My mission: helping L&D to raise its profile through sharing L&D Data Stories.	6
Why this topic? How L&D Data Storytelling can help you to shine a light on the commercial power of the L&D role.	8
Glossary of helpful terms A glossary of terms you'll need to understand to get the best out of this book.	12
Chapter 1: The narrative of a data story How to draw on The Hero's Journey to create a narrative framework for your L&D stories.	20
Chapter 2: The numbers in a data story How to give your story credibility: adding in the all-important numbers to create L&D Data Stories.	31
Chapter 3: Bringing it all together – in 7 simple steps How to combine your narrative and your numbers to tell a compelling story.	59
Chapter 4: Conclusion and next steps Setting out on your next storytelling journey.	81
References Further reading and resources to support you on your storytelling journeys.	84
Acknowledgements	86

Foreword

Learning and development (L&D) is essential to any modern organisation but simply saying so is not enough; we need to be able to prove it. And the one thing that's been lacking in L&D for the whole time I've been involved in it is evidence of efficacy. We need to demonstrate that we are able to plan learning interventions that solve specific problems and make a measurable impact.

There's this notion called the "conspiracy of convenience" where everyone plays along with L&D initiatives, assuming they know the dance. But it's not a coordinated effort; it's more like a chaotic conga line. While it may feel good momentarily, it often lacks substance. We've accepted this without question, hindering meaningful progress. It's time to challenge this status quo, ensuring our efforts lead to tangible outcomes and real change.

L&D teams need to build the kind of credibility and currency within the organisation that are enjoyed by finance teams as a given. But it's not easy. Mainly because you need to engage in a very different conversation with your stakeholder at the outset.

A chief learning officer (CLO) I talked to recently mentioned that building credibility within the organisation took him about two years. Building belief in L&D requires starting from scratch and gradually earning recognition.

Think about it as a journey, helping your stakeholder to push beyond "we'd like an experience" to "we'd like to make a meaningful change to the way that we operate". This means offering solutions that bring real results and questioning old practices that don't make much of a difference.

At the heart of demonstrating L&D's impact lies the ability to identify, track and address key issues from the outset. Incremental progress towards meaningful change, grounded in data-driven insights, is essential for success.

Using data storytelling, we can revolutionise how we convey the impact of our initiatives. Gone are the days of fantasy tales; now, we rely on credible success stories supported by data. These narratives – or L&D Data Stories – are vital for L&D teams to establish and retain influence. Without them, we're vulnerable to setbacks.

Neil Cunningham's *Narratives and Numbers* is a call to action for L&D leaders, offering practical advice on how to use data storytelling to demonstrate impact and gain influence. Neil presents a compelling shift in perspective from viewing L&D as a "nice to have" to recognising it as a "must have". And he does so in a way that makes the reader feel engaged, inspired and motivated.

He encourages us to take it step by step, and then shows us how to approach each step for real-world impact.

David James

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