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The Way We Talk About Learning is Killing Our Influence

Learning Leadership 2026

Melissa Kruminas

Melissa Kruminas (MOL, CPTD, SHRM-CP) is VP, Learning Experience & Enablement at Litmos where she helps organizations use learning to drive meaningful business outcomes. With a background in learning strategy and organizational leadership, she specializes in L&D, Customer Education, and Enablement. Melissa is committed to helping learning leaders and practitioners connect learning directly to revenue, performance, risk reduction, and growth across both internal and external audiences.



Find your voice.

Build your influence.

By the end of today's session, you'll be equipped to:

- Spot the language that weakens your message.
- Connect learning to what stakeholders care about.
- Translate learning activity into a compelling story of impact.

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Imagine tracking your fitness like this.

- How many times you went to the gym
- How many minutes you stayed there
- How many times you logged calories in your fitness app

You could hit every one of those targets and *still not improve your fitness*.



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That’s the way most people are still talking about learning.

We’re talking about the equivalent of:

- Gym visits → course completions
- Workout minutes → time spent learning
- Calories logged → content consumed

But not:

- Strength gained → performance improvement
- Goals achieved → business outcomes

97%

Of organizations track completion rates

8%

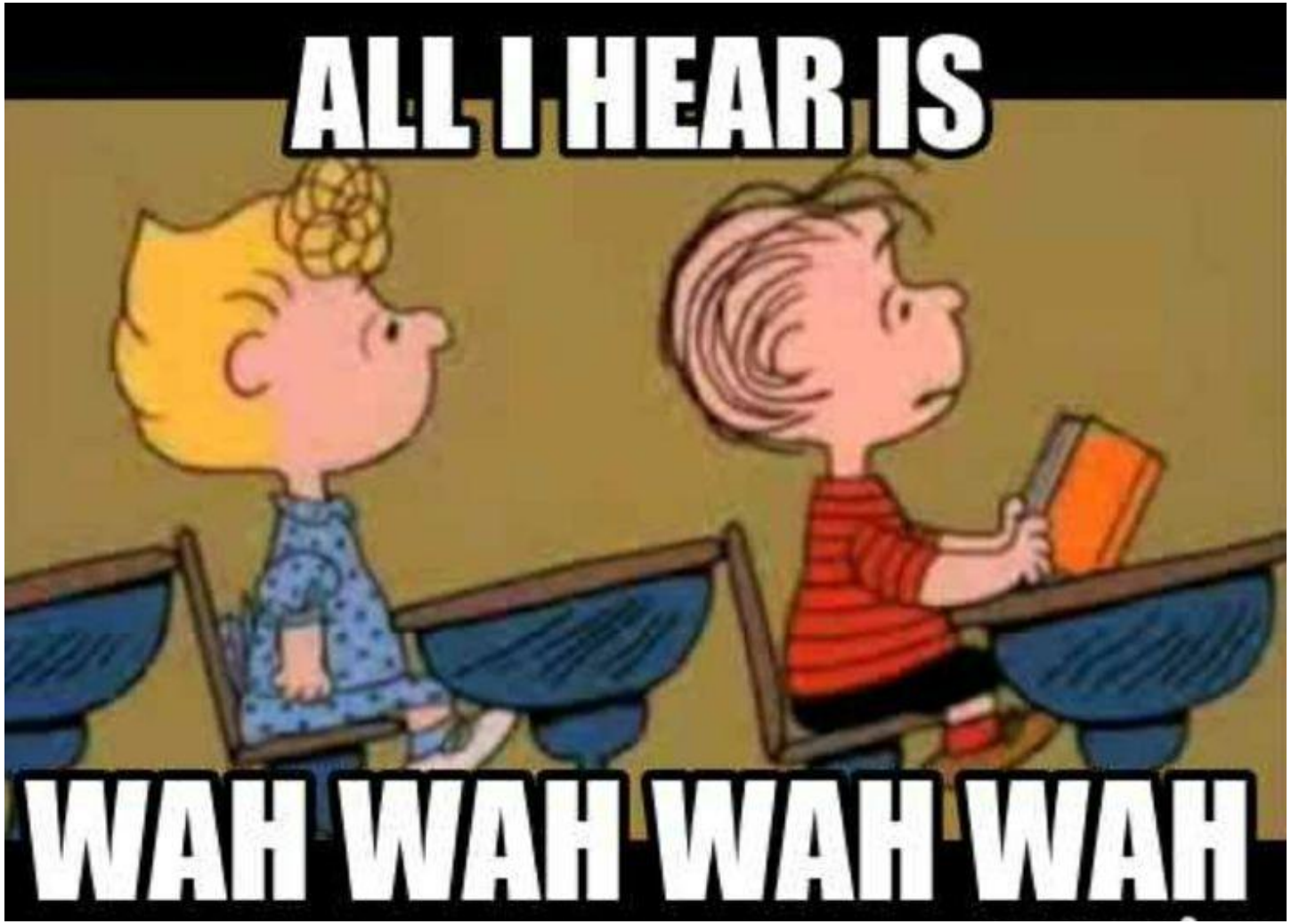
Of organizations say they are very effective at measuring the business impact of learning

Source: *Association for Talent Development's Measuring Impact Research Report*

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Why Stakeholders Tune Us Out


ALL I HEAR IS
WAH WAH WAH WAH

The Stakeholder Version of the Gym Report

94% completion

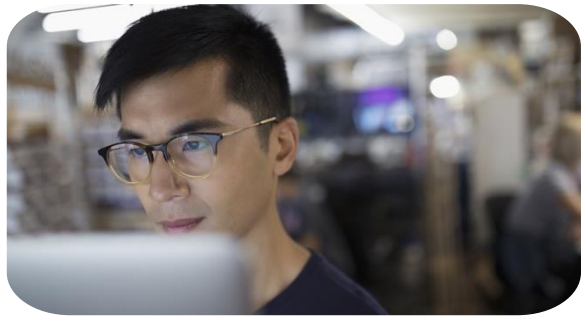
4.7/5 satisfaction

15,000 learning hours



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Who you sound like determines the room you get invited to.



Individual Contributors

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are most likely to impact their career growth and income.



Functional Leaders

Objectives & Key Results (OKRs) and measures of their team's **productivity**, **quality**, and **operational efficiency**.



Executives

Overall organizational performance such as **financial** metrics, **customer** metrics, **employee** metrics, and **risk mitigation**.

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Making it Matter

Value = impact promised
Impact = value delivered

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Choose a metric the business already cares about. Shared metrics create shared ownership and influence.

Function	Sample Shared Metrics
Customer Success	Adoption
Product	Feature utilization
Support	Ticket reduction
Sales	Ramp time
HR	Retention

Our role is to help connect the dots, not just report on training activity.

Training Metrics Leading Indicator	**Behavior Change** Lagging Indicator	**Business Impact** Cascading Indicator
Course completions	New hires follow onboarding process	Time to productivity
Assessment scores	Demonstrated skill proficiency	Performance improvement
Certification achieved	Use of certified skills in role	Fewer support tickets
Engagement/completions	Fewer support tickets & Improved customer satisfaction (CSAT/NPS)	Retention & Expansion
Compliance training completion	Adherence to policies and procedures	Reduced compliance incidents / risk
Content consumption	Better decision-making in role	Revenue growth / deal quality

"Only a small percentage of organizations measure behavior change or business impact. " -Association for Talent Development

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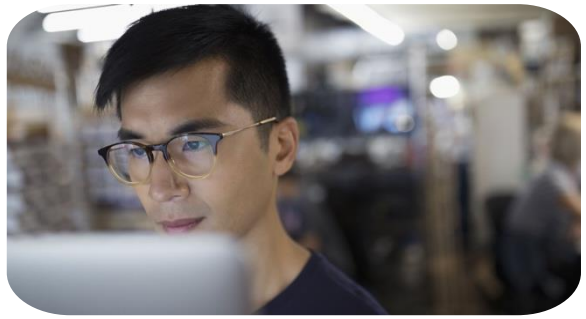
Pair & Share · 3 minutes

Think about a current program you're working on. Share your leading indicator, lagging indicator, and cascading indicator with your partner.

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Communicating the Value

The same initiative matters to different people for different reasons.



Individual Contributors

Help me succeed in my role.

Confidence, competence, credibility, career growth



Functional Leaders

Help my team perform.

Productivity, quality, team capacity



Executives

Help the organization deliver.

Revenue, cost, customer retention, risk mitigation

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Lead with value.

“We need three hours of your team’s time for training.”

↓

“Your experienced agents are losing six hours a week to repeat questions. We’re proposing three hours of practice to help new hires work independently sooner.”

Make the reason to care clear before explaining the program.

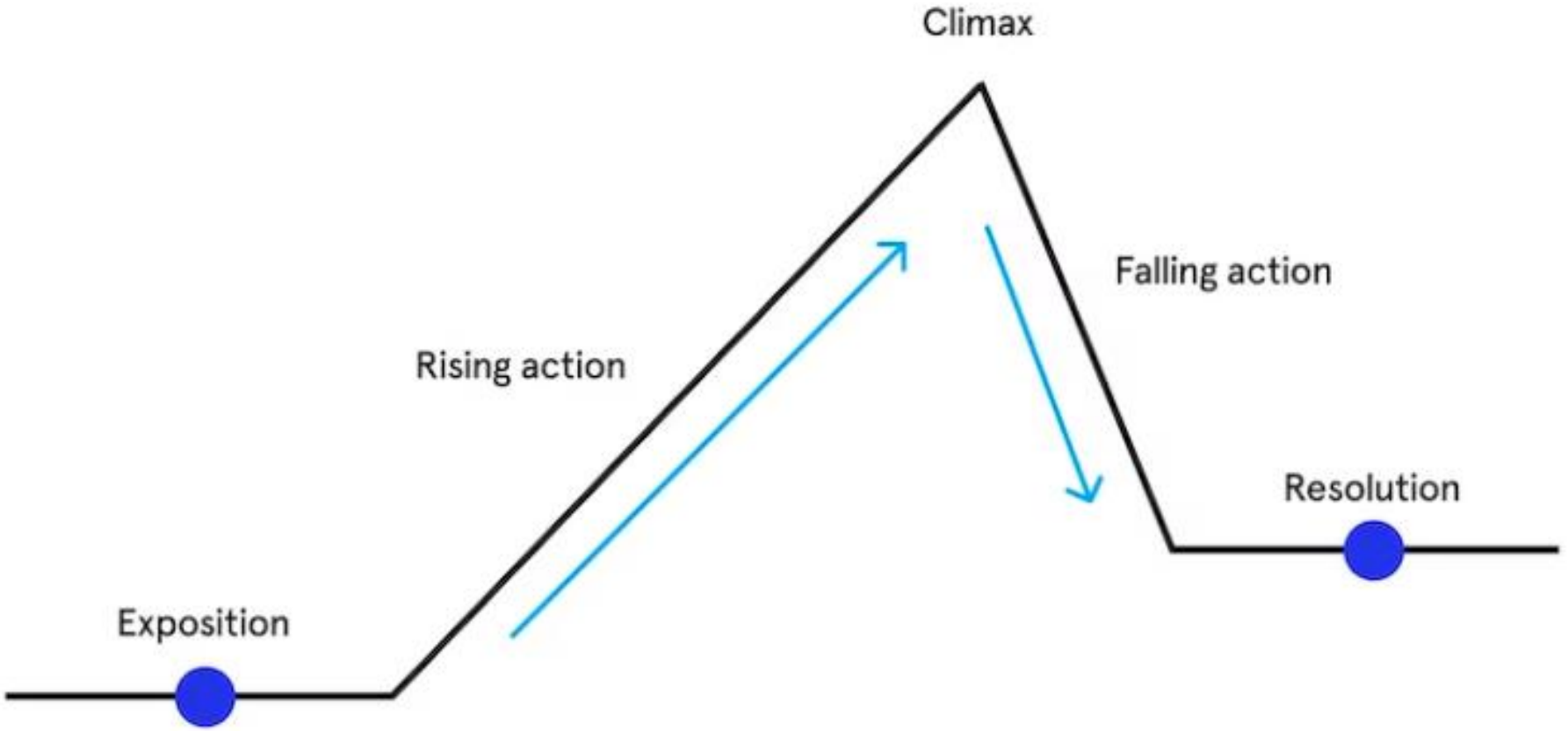


Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky

Anchoring the Message in Value

Change	*Why should they care?* *Influence*	*Why does it matter?* *Impact*
What changes for the **organization**?	Higher customer satisfaction Greater trust and loyalty Legal or reputational risk mitigation	Increased revenue Lower operating costs Increased volume/productivity Churn/Retention
What changes for the **person**?	Confidence Feeling valued and recognized Relief from feeling overwhelmed Fear	Stronger KPIs/goals achieved Raise or career advancement Termination

What makes a good story?



What makes a good story?



Give them a reason to act in under 60 seconds.

SITUATION

Start with a goal or reality your audience recognizes.

What are we trying to achieve?

COMPLICATION

Explain what threatens that goal—and why it matters.

What is getting in the way?

THE STAKES

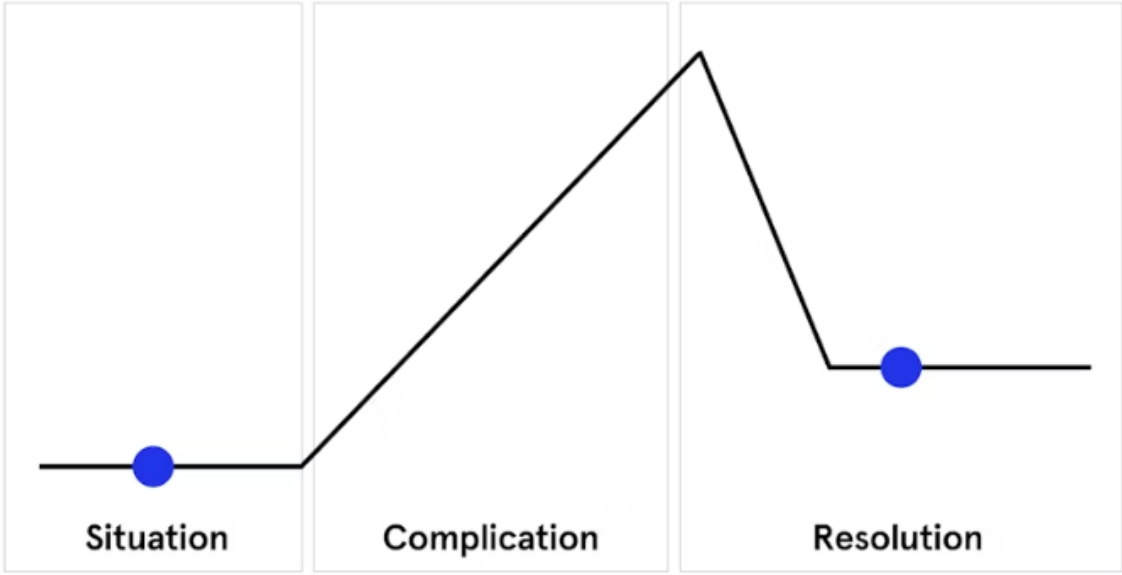
Clearly articulate the risk of waiting.

What happens if this doesn't change.

RESOLUTION

Recommend a specific action and make any ask clear.

What should we do next?



Adapted from the McKinsey SCR Framework

Same recommendation. Different reasons to care.

The approach: A six-week onboarding pilot combining guided practice and manager coaching.
Show what improves—and why that improvement matters to the person listening.

Audience	Situation	Complication	Resolution
Learner	You've finished your initial onboarding content and are taking customer cases now. I know you want to help customers solve problems and hit your targets.	You still need help with unfamiliar cases. Your time to resolution is under target, and depending on colleagues slows you down. I know you'd like to be able to resolve those independently so you can hit your targets.	Guided practice and feedback will help you handle cases independently sooner, meet your targets, and feel more confident with customers. We know that new reps who practice real cases hit their targets six weeks sooner and get promoted sooner.
Manager	You need a team that meets service targets without burning out your experienced agents.	Each mentor spends six hours a week coaching, leaving less time for customers. You're caught between supporting new hires and overloading the people you count on most.	The new pilot program targets three coaching hours per mentor weekly, giving your team capacity back and helping you develop a stronger, more self-sufficient team without burning out your top performers.
Executive	Support demand is growing 20%, with no additional headcount. You need to protect both margins and customer trust.	Coaching coverage costs $156,000 annually in overtime. As demand grows, slower service puts customer satisfaction and retention at risk.	The pilot targets faster time to productivity with an estimated $78,000 in annual overtime savings—protecting service quality and customer satisfaction.

Application

Choose one program or initiative you are currently working on.

- **Who are the primary learners?**
- **Who are the managers of the learners?**
- **Who is the executive who cares?**

Person 1: Pitch the program to the learners.
Person 2: Pitch the program to the manager of the learners.
Person 3: Pitch the program to the executive who cares about the program.

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Key Takeaways

- **Stop leading with training.**
  Lead with the change in behavior or performance instead.
- **Make behavior change the bridge you build every conversation on.**
  Connects what you deliver to what the business cares about, and it's the earliest proof that results are coming.
- **Speak the metric your leader already owns.**
  Adopt their language, whether that's adoption, ramp time, or ticket volume, and you become a partner in their results rather than a reporter of training activity.
- **Tailor the reason, not the program.**
  Same initiative, three different reasons to say yes.
- **Ask for one measurable commitment on Monday.**
  Pick one current program, define its leading, lagging, and cascading indicators, and get the business owner to agree to track them with you.

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Thank you!

For additional questions, contact:

Melissa Kruminas

Melissa.Kruminas@litmos.com



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