

Academy Building



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Introduction

Learning and development are essential for the sustainable growth of organisations. An Academy is not a standalone training programme, but a strategic instrument to secure knowledge, develop employees and future-proof the organisation. That does not mean that every organisation necessarily needs an Academy, but organisations that take learning and development seriously create a significant advantage, for their people as well as for themselves.

Too often, we see employees return from an external training full of enthusiasm, only to find that the knowledge they gained is not sufficiently embedded within the organisation. Without structural integration, the impact of learning and development quickly fades over time. An Academy turns learning into a continuous and integrated process, where knowledge transfer is not only effective but also creates lasting value. And many organisations stand to benefit from that.

We believe that every organisation has the potential to create a learning environment that not only empowers its employees but also strengthens the organisation as a whole. Employees develop themselves, not just for their current role, but build the skills they need to face future challenges. Teams collaborate more effectively and work from a shared vision of leadership, innovation and growth.

Developing an Academy requires a tailored approach and a well-thought-out strategy. It starts with gaining insight into the existing learning and development structures

and the needs within the organisation. By closely aligning with the organisation's strategy and culture, an Academy becomes not a standalone initiative, but a structural pillar within the organisation.

In this whitepaper, we share our vision, methodology and practical insights. We explain why an Academy is valuable, how it is built and what impact it has on the organisation. Our experience shows that organisations that take learning and development seriously gain a significant advantage, both for their employees and for the organisation as a whole.

We hope these insights support you in developing an Academy within your organisation, or help you shape what best fits your context. If you would like to discuss what this could look like in practice, feel free to contact us.

Kind regards,

Chantal & Matthijs

Why build an Academy?

In recent years, the nature of 'work' has been changing faster than ever. As a result, many employers struggle to find the right people and even more to retain them. Climate change, an ageing population and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to influence the way we approach and organise work.

“An Academy within your organisation is not just a training programme; it is a strategic instrument for making your people and your organisation future-ready.”

together in one consistent, tailor-made approach.

In addition, the rapidly changing labour market plays a major role.

Technological and market developments require employees to continuously acquire new skills. An Academy ensures that people can keep developing in line with the organisation's needs. This not only strengthens organisational agility but also increases employee engagement.

The necessity of an Academy

Many organisations discover that their current learning approach is fragmented. Employees attend training sessions from various providers, without a shared vision for learning and development.

This leads to inconsistencies in ways of working, terminology and collaboration across teams. An Academy addresses this by bringing all development pathways





A number of challenges organisations face when learning & development is not approached structurally:

Fragmentation

Teams and departments work with different methodologies and external training providers, resulting in a lack of shared language.

Lack of strategic alignment

There is no connection between learning & development and the organisation's strategic goals, meaning training initiatives do not contribute to long-term ambitions.

Lower engagement

Employees lack a clear growth path, which weakens their motivation and their connection to the organisation. This also makes attracting new talent significantly more difficult.

Loss of knowledge

Organisations invest in training, but without a central structure, valuable knowledge is easily lost.

Employees attend external courses and bring new insights back into the organisation, but without a platform to share or embed this knowledge internally, it remains isolated.

New skills and insights disappear when employees leave, and organisations remain dependent on one-off training initiatives instead of a continuous learning culture. As a result, learning becomes an individual activity rather than a strategic building block for the organisation.

What makes an Academy valuable?

An Academy goes beyond simply transferring knowledge. It creates a shared learning and development culture in which employees not only perform better, but also take greater ownership of their growth. At Engagement Builders, we view an Academy as a 'House of Development': a place where subject-matter expertise, collaboration skills and leadership development come together within one integrated approach.

"We often see employees developing themselves in different places, without an overarching framework. This leads to fragmentation and a lack of alignment between teams and departments. An Academy brings everything together under one shared vision, enabling employees to develop a common language and approach. This ensures that knowledge is not only transferred, but also embedded within the organisation. It also creates a learning environment in which employees not only acquire skills, but also develop a shared understanding of the organisation's goals. Learning & Development then becomes an integral part of the culture.

What we frequently observe in practice is that senior management is sent to, for example, a renowned institute in Switzerland, while people on the work floor attend a local training. As a result, they speak a completely different language when it comes to leadership and development. An Academy breaks through these silos by developing everyone from the same principles and frameworks,

creating a shared vision of leadership and collaboration.

And this insight emerged directly from our daily work. We would train young employees in personal leadership and collaboration skills, only to hear later that they were struggling within their organisation. They spoke a language of growth and development that their managers did not understand. Those managers had never learned to look at development in that way. Our conclusion was that an integrated learning and development offering, one that applies the same principles and methods across all levels, provides the solution: an Academy. This ensures that development doesn't only impact individuals, but strengthens the organisation as a whole."

The next step

Now that it's clear why an Academy is invaluable for organisations, the next question is: How do you build one? An effective Academy requires more than a vision, it needs a thoughtful approach in which customisation, involvement and strategic alignment are central. In the next chapter, we explore how Engagement Builders shapes this process and supports organisations in building an Academy that truly makes an impact.

How we build an Academy

Building an Academy is not a ready-made solution that we simply pull from a shelf. Every organisation is unique, which means an Academy must be tailor-made to create real impact.

Impact means more than employees learning new skills, it means those skills are actually applied in practice. It is about visible change: teams that collaborate more effectively, leaders who coach with greater awareness and an organisation that responds more flexibly to developments in the market. A well-designed Academy ensures that learning is not a standalone initiative, but becomes a strategic pillar within the organisation.

The Engagement Builders approach

Setting up an Academy does not begin with a standard format, it begins with a thorough analysis of the organisation. We do not start from what we think will work, but from what is already there. What are the ambitions? What is happening within the organisation? What initiatives and structures already exist? This forms the foundation of the Academy, ensuring it does not become a separate training structure, but an integrated part of the organisational culture.

To guide this process effectively, we use a step-by-step approach built around five core phases:





1. Familiarisation: understanding what already exists and what works

“We begin by gathering documentation: policy documents, existing training materials, strategic plans, and the organisation’s mission and vision. We also look at the core values and how the organisation views learning and development.” This first step maps out existing structures and ambitions. We also examine external partners the organisation works with and the potential role they could play within the Academy.

2. Interviews with key stakeholders

The next step involves speaking with HR-managers, board members, and other key figures within the organisation.

“One question we often ask is: Why do people choose to work here? What makes

them feel connected to the organisation?

This provides insight not only into the organisational culture, but also into the motivation and needs of employees.”

Other essential questions include:

Why is learning and development important

to you? How do you see the future of development within the organisation?

What do you hope to achieve?

3. Appreciative inquiry sessions with employees

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach that focuses not on what is lacking, but on what already works well and how these strengths can be expanded.

“We don’t start by trying to solve problems.

We start by discovering what already works within the organisation. We identify successes and strengths, and explore

how these can form the foundation of the Academy. This ensures the Academy builds

on the organisation's strengths and is created in a positive and energising way."

An Academy should not only align with the organisation's vision it must also meet the needs of employees. That's why we facilitate interactive sessions in which employees co-create the shape and content of the Academy. We literally bring the target group together and ask:

What do you need? How do you prefer to learn? What forms work best for you, on-site, external locations, online, or multidisciplinary formats?

These sessions typically last one and a half half-days and are both substantial and inspiring. We create a context where people feel safe to brainstorm and share ideas and it should be enjoyable to participate!

During these sessions, we work through the following steps:

- **Define:** What should the Academy deliver? What is the central question?
- **Discover:** What existing successes and positive experiences can form the foundation? What conditions are needed for a successful Academy?
- **Dream:** Imagine we are several years into the future, what has this Academy achieved? What does it mean for employees, management, clients, and the wider sector?
- **Design:** What does the Academy look like? Which themes, learning pathways and formats should be included?

4. Feedback and refinement

The insights from the interviews and sessions are translated into an initial concept. "We share the findings with all stakeholders, so they can respond, add input, and refine. This creates ownership and ensures the Academy genuinely fits the organisation."

This is a crucial phase, because broad involvement ensures the Academy is not perceived as something imposed 'from above,' but as something co-created throughout the organisation.

When employees recognise themselves in the outcomes, they feel committed to the Academy's success.

This step is therefore not just a review moment, it is an active co-creation phase in which the Academy is further shaped together with the organisation.



In this phase, we also determine how the Academy can continue to evolve over time. An Academy is not a fixed end product, it is a living, ongoing process.

That's why this phase looks not only at the initial implementation, but also at the flexibility and long-term sustainability of the Academy.

Through regular evaluation and iteration, the Academy remains relevant and aligned with the changing needs of the organisation and its employees.

5. Blueprint and implementation

Based on all input, we design and build the Academy. During the design and development process, we work closely with HR and L&D managers, as well as a member of the leadership team who holds formal responsibility for the Academy.

This ensures that the Academy does not remain an isolated HR initiative, but

becomes an organisation-wide programme supported at every level.

We also use Impact Mapping to ensure that every learning intervention contributes directly to the organisation's strategic goals. This method helps to clarify the connection between a training or learning pathway and the desired behavioural changes and competencies.

As a result, learning becomes measurable and strategically grounded, ensuring that the Academy is not just a collection of separate trainings, but a coherent and impactful development programme.

A strong start lays the foundation for success and that foundation is solid after this phase.

But how does an Academy work in daily practice, and how do we continue steering for maximum impact?

We explore that in the next chapter.



Academy in practice



An Academy is not a static concept but a dynamic and continuously evolving part of an organisation. Its success depends not only on the initial design, but also on how it is maintained, refined, and embedded into everyday practice.

In this chapter, we explore how an Academy operates within an organisation and which mechanisms are essential for achieving long-term impact.

Continuous development and adaptation

A well-designed Academy grows along with the organisation.

This means that the learning offer and methodologies are continually optimised based on new insights, shifting market developments, and participant feedback. Organisations that implement an Academy often work with iterative improvement cycles, in which training courses, workshops and learning pathways are systematically evaluated and adjusted.

“Impact Mapping is an essential tool for us. It allows us to show exactly how each learning intervention connects to the competencies and behavioural changes the organisation wants to see. This ensures that every step in the learning process is measurable and directly contributes to

strategic goals. By continuously evaluating and fine-tuning, the Academy remains not only up-to-date but also highly effective.”

Learning in everyday practice

An Academy is only truly effective when learning extends beyond formal training sessions and becomes integrated into daily work. This means that knowledge transfer and skills development are built directly into work processes and into the culture of the organisation. One frequently used approach is to encourage social and informal learning processes. This can be done through peer-learning sessions, coaching-on-the-job and multidisciplinary projects in which employees immediately apply their newly learned skills also play an important role.



An Academy only becomes truly valuable when employees not only learn, but also integrate what they have learned into their daily work.

In addition, leadership plays a crucial role in embedding an Academy. Leaders must not only facilitate employee development but also actively participate in the learning process themselves. By fostering a learning culture in which reflection and continuous improvement are central, an Academy becomes a natural part of the organisation.

From isolated initiatives to a learning organisation

In many organisations, learning initiatives are fragmented and organised on an ad hoc basis. An Academy helps to bring these individual initiatives together and streamline them within an integrated strategy. This prevents learning and development programmes from becoming dependent on individual departments or temporary projects and ensures a structural, organisation-wide approach.

The success of an Academy is not only measured by certificates obtained or training sessions attended, but above all by the impact on the organisation and its people.

By viewing learning and development as a strategic pillar, organisations are better able to anticipate change, stimulate innovation, and keep employees sustainably engaged.

What will you get out of it?

An Academy is an investment in the future of an organisation. It not only raises the knowledge level of employees, but also contributes to strategic growth, increased engagement and long-term development. In this chapter, we explore the concrete results an Academy can generate and how these outcomes contribute to organisational success.

Increased engagement and ownership

A well-functioning Academy strengthens employee engagement.

When people can actively contribute to their own development and career path, they feel more connected to the organisation. This leads not only to higher satisfaction and motivation, but also to a stronger sense of belonging.

When employees meet each other in a learning environment, collaboration and

knowledge-sharing naturally increase. This makes learning not only more effective, but also a structural part of the organisational culture.

An Academy also contributes to stronger networks both within and beyond the organisation. Employees build lasting relationships during learning programmes, and even when they eventually move on, they remain valuable connections in the wider professional network. This creates long-term impact that extends well beyond the learning experience itself.

A further advantage of an in-company Academy is that learning becomes an accessible and natural part of the organisational culture.

Unlike external training, where employees participate only occasionally, an Academy creates a continuous learning environment that consistently supports people in their development.



Direct impact on performance and innovation

The impact of an Academy on employees and teams is directly measurable.

By aligning training and development programmes with strategic organisational goals, learning is directly linked to business outcomes. Employees apply newly gained knowledge more quickly, leading to more efficient work processes and higher productivity. This makes an Academy an integral driver of better organisational performance.

An Academy also fosters an environment in which employees feel safe to share challenges and show vulnerability.

By normalising learning and making complex issues discussable, teams develop higher levels of psychological safety and trust.

This strengthens collaboration and improves the way employees handle change and innovation.

In addition, an Academy enables organisations to tailor learning formats to the specific needs of employees and teams. Some topics lend themselves well to internal learning programmes, while others require an external trainer who brings in-depth expertise and a fresh perspective. By combining both approaches, learning becomes more effective and more relevant. Academies also often build a strong network function. Employees who complete an Academy and later move on, frequently remain connected as ambassadors or sparring partners.

In practice, new assignments, partnerships or other valuable opportunities often emerge from the relationships built within an Academy.



Organisation-wide return on investment

In addition to individual growth and improved performance, an Academy also creates value at organisational level. A structured approach to learning and development prevents knowledge loss, streamlines training budgets and ensures that employees at all levels work from a shared vision. By organising training in-house, programmes are more closely aligned with day-to-day practice and help to reinforce the organisation's culture and way of working.

An Academy also indirectly reduces recruitment and onboarding costs, because employees feel connected for longer and are better prepared for internal career steps. This leads to higher retention and lower recruitment costs in the long term. When colleagues learn together within their own organisation, this not only strengthens knowledge-sharing, but also deepens mutual connection.

The impact of an Academy is continuously measured. This is done through post-training evaluations, conversations with participants and impact mapping. In steering conversations with clients, we systematically explore how the Academy contributes to organisational goals. In this way, learning becomes not only transparent, but also measurable at a strategic level.

An Academy also supports the attraction and retention of talent. In a labour market where continuous development

is increasingly important, employees are more likely to choose organisations that take their growth seriously. This makes an Academy not only an investment in existing employees, but also a strategic advantage in employer branding.

From learning to strategic impact

An Academy is more than a collection of training courses: it is a powerful instrument for realising an organisation's strategic goals. By placing learning and development at the heart of the organisation, you not only strengthen individual employees, but also make the organisation as a whole more agile, innovative and future-proof. Ultimately, you are not just building an Academy, but a culture in which continuous learning and development is the norm. Of course, we already mentioned it in the introduction, but we wrote this whitepaper primarily to inspire you, to give you a concrete picture of what is involved in building an Academy and to answer the questions you may have.

If you still have questions after reading this whitepaper, or would like to explore what might be a good fit for your organisation, we would be delighted to talk.

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