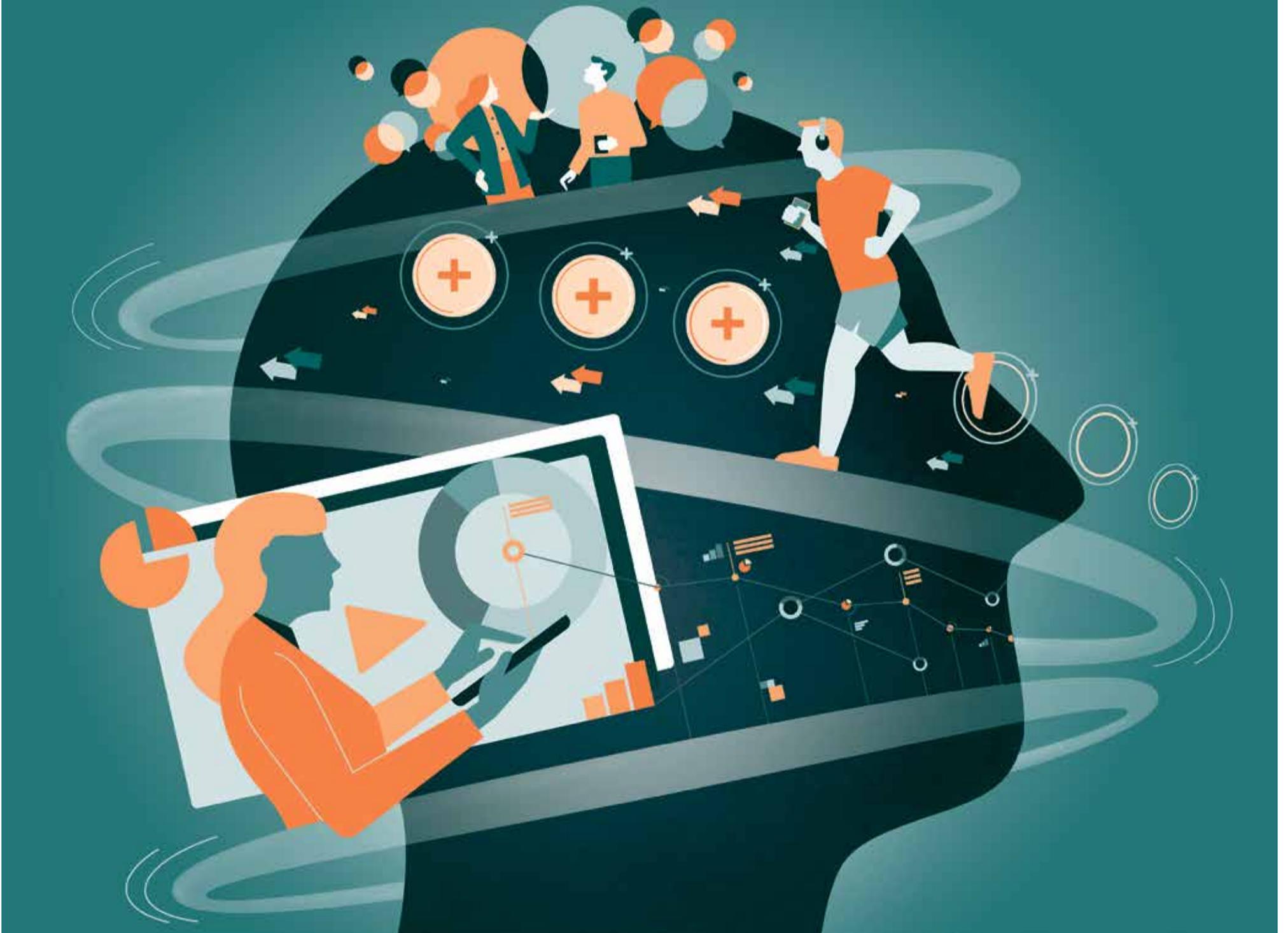


# LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

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**04** CAN SOFT SKILLS REALLY BE TAUGHT?

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# LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

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## Contributors

### Jon Axworthy

Freelance journalist, writing about health, tech, science and the future, his work has been published in *T3*, *Wareable* and *The Ambient*.

### Peter Crush

Freelance business journalist, specialising in human resources and management issues, he was deputy editor of *HR* magazine.

### Karam Filfilan

Business editor and journalist specialising in human resources, the future of work and innovation. Previously deputy editor of *Changeboard*.

### Suchandrika Chakrabarti

Freelance journalist and podcaster, her work has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Times* and the *New Statesman*.

### Cath Everett

Journalist specialising in workplace, leadership and organisational culture issues, she also writes about the impact of technology on business and society.

### Daniel Thomas

Writer and editor, he has contributed to the *BBC*, *Newsweek*, *Fund Strategy* and *EducationInvestor*, among other publications.

## Raconteur reports

Publishing manager  
**Libby Owen-Jones**

Associate editor  
**Peter Archer**

Deputy editor  
**Francesca Cassidy**

Managing editor  
**Benjamin Chiou**

Head of production  
**Justyna O'Connell**

Design  
**Joanna Bird**  
**Sara Gelfgren**  
**Kellie Jerrard**  
**Harry Lewis-Irlam**  
**Celina Lucey**  
**Colm McDermott**  
**Samuele Motta**  
**Jack Woolrich**

Head of design  
**Tim Whitlock**

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PERSONALISATION

# Why micro-learning requires a focused development strategy

Splitting training into bite-sized chunks, fitted around employee schedules and suited to their own pace, is trending in learning and development, but careful implementation is crucial

## Karam Filfilan

**D**isengaged employees, an always-on culture and the constant need to update skills during a period of technological upheaval; there are many challenges facing learning and development (L&D) professionals. With employees increasingly seeking personalised, digital learning, it is no surprise to see a trend towards micro-learning. But is packaging training programmes into bespoke, bite-sized chunks really the best way to upskill a workforce?

Micro-learning – on-demand, single outcome-focused training often delivered through digital formats – is on the rise. More measurable than day-long training programmes and more cost effective than allowing employees time away from their desks, micro-learning is seen as a way of improving employee engagement and skills in an era of constant disruption.

According to Gallup's 2018 *State of the Global Workforce* report, just 15 per cent of employees worldwide are actively engaged in their jobs, costing an estimated \$7 trillion in lost revenue annually.

The intended outcomes of micro-learning certainly seem to match what employees want. A recent report by global learning consultancy Kineo examined the

learning intentions of 8,000 employees across 13 different industries. It found a huge gap between the quality of training offered and the needs of employees. Of those surveyed, 85 per cent said they struggled to access training in their workplace, with only 16 per cent of employees finding the learning programmes offered by their employers effective.

To combat this, employees wanted to take L&D into their own hands. Some 71 per cent wanted to choose when and where to undertake their own training, 68 per cent believed they would pick up skills faster if they had more control over their learning and 66 per cent had opted to invest in self-training outside the workplace.

"Only by letting employees learn on their own terms, fitted around their schedules, will organisations

enable them to train in a way that is in sync with the needs of business," argues John Yates, director of corporate learning at City & Guilds Group, of which Kineo is a member.

"A more personalised, blended learning approach, delivered at the point of need, is critical if employers want to build an engaged and skilled workforce that's fit for the future, and prevent investment from going to waste."

For many organisations, the trend towards micro-learning is irreversible. The new cohort of generation Z employees has grown up utilising digital content for learning – think YouTube, online forums and social media – and are used to learning small amounts of information in short bursts, as well as filtering through various sources

68%

of employees say they would pick up skills faster if they had more direct control over the pace of workplace learning

Kineo 2019

38%

say they want more personalisation in their workplace learning

26%

say they want bite-sized learning



Paul Schater/Unsplash

“Address the challenges they face and concerns they have, rather than just dumping content on them

be better utilised in the business, through both peer-to-peer learning and user-generated content from in-house experts.

“We’re looking at allowing employees to upload their own content, like short video recordings, to a platform where it can be assessed and shared. This will help us better prove the effectiveness of the training, knowledge application and behavioural change, but also enables more sharing of experiences,” she says.

Not all L&D professionals are convinced that the trend towards micro-learning is inevitable or even desirable.

Nick Shackleton-Jones, director of learning and performance innovation at PA Consulting, believes the idea that we have shorter attention spans and need more bite-sized, micro-learning content is fundamentally wrong.

“Attention spans haven’t significantly reduced; people still binge-watch Netflix series. But there is so much more out there to compete for our attention,” he says.

“When employees say ‘I don’t have time for training’, what they really mean is ‘your training is a waste of time to me’. They always have time to Google a problem,” adds Mr Shackleton-Jones.

He believes the danger of micro-learning is that employers focus too much on the structure and ease of use of training programmes and not enough on the actual content.

“The key to engaging employees in training is to address the challenges they actually face and concerns they have, rather than just dumping content on them. Training teams need to invest more time in actually understanding their audiences,” he insists.

This is a view shared by James Cory-Wright, head of learning design at Kineo, who wants training professionals to “abandon formal learning structures”.

“Think of training as information and break it down into its most granular form. Then, present it as easily, clearly and accessibly as possible, in as many formats as possible so employees can access it on any device or at any time. In other words, deliver learning content in the same way it is accessed outside the workplace,” he advises.

Micro-learning might be the most accessible, personalised way for employees to learn new skills in the digital era. But without careful consideration of the content created and the outcomes required, it won’t improve engagement. As ever, success lies in truly understanding your people. ●

of information. In doing so, they become used to learning at their own pace, in their own way.

For L&D leaders, the challenge of how to ensure these learning desires marry with the needs of the business, and are measurable, remain.

It’s important to focus on learning outcomes, rather than different types of learning methods, says Kim Edwards, senior manager of talent and leadership development at Getty Images.

“I’m not keen on the term ‘micro-learning’, as I’m not sure distinctions between different methods of learning is helpful. The assimilation and application of knowledge should always be made as easy as possible, which means structuring it in small, short modules that are more approachable and memorable, and therefore more likely to be put into practice,” says Ms Edwards.

She believes that company culture plays a huge part in encouraging positive attitudes towards learning. Getty Images takes a blended learning approach to training, offering programmes both online and face to face. It also encourages each employee to consider an annual personal development goal and gives all staff access to an online on-demand learning platform, which can be used via mobile and when working from home.

Ms Edwards says Getty Images is exploring how social learning can

# The age of talent experience

Since the term was coined in 1997, talent management has played a central role in the human resources (HR) strategies of companies of all sizes

**T**he ability for businesses to attract, retain and develop high-quality staff is becoming increasingly vital for success as up-start competitors continue to disrupt traditional industries by leveraging innovative technologies and skilled employees.

Yet talent management has significantly evolved over the last 20 years. The advances of technology in the business and consumer world are causing staff to have high expectations of the employee experience, leading to the establishment of a new discipline called talent experience that focuses on an employee-centric view, rather than a company-centric model.

“We have a strong belief that companies need to embrace the benefits of both talent management and talent experience to be successful. Firms should join together their goals and objectives with employee aspirations if they want to be in a position where they can thrive and overcome the challenges of an ever-changing world,” says Vincent Belliveau, chief executive, Europe, Middle East and Africa, at Cornerstone OnDemand, a



global leader in cloud-based learning, talent management and talent experience software.

There are countless platforms that provide HR teams the tools they need to plan for the future and align talent objectives with business objectives. But organisations sometimes focus too much on either talent management or talent experience, when actually both together is what’s needed. Together, organisations attract, upskill and retain their people, while employees feel motivated, engaged and envisage a future with their organisation.

“The expectation of fast, anywhere and anytime learning is now the norm, and future generations will seek the skills to evaluate and act on information, rather than just recall large amounts of knowledge,” says Mr Belliveau.

By utilising the latest innovations in artificial intelligence and personalisation technologies, Cornerstone provides staff access to tailored learning and development content that is relevant to their interests. Employees gain from using internal career portals to map out a career path in their organisation, at the same time as benefiting the business thanks to the creation of a high-performing and motivated workforce.

“Cornerstone is helping organisations manage the entire life cycle of their talent at a strategic level, as well as provide personalised, relevant and useful learning access so employees can take ownership of their growth and career paths as organisations evolve,” adds Mr Belliveau.

It’s clear that effectively managing talent, ensuring employees are motivated and bringing as much value to the company as possible is no small task. But at the same time, overwhelming staff with irrelevant or unnecessary learning experiences can do more

harm than good, illustrating the importance of deploying a sophisticated talent experience strategy.

Conversely, deploying cumbersome and unfriendly learning and talent management processes causes harm too. This points to the need for companies to think holistically about both talent management and talent experience.

At a time when many organisations are undergoing often dramatic levels of change and disruption due to the impact of technology, companies need to ensure employees remain confident in their ability to utilise new technologies and create meaningful business value.

The suite of solutions offered by Cornerstone enables employees to access on-demand learning and make use of self-service tools that allows them to thrive no matter what challenges they encounter in work.

Comprehensive, centralised tools help prepare workforces for this next era in the world of work and helps staff to answer questions like, what do I need to learn right now to be successful in my role? Or what potential careers can I have in the business and what skills do I need to succeed?

Mr Belliveau concludes: “Employees need more than ever to develop their skills and understand how to learn in the most effective way. Cornerstone pushes the development of its technology, leading learning and development innovation that is transforming lives in the workplace.”

93%

of global CEOs recognise the need or have taken steps to change their strategies for attracting and retaining the best people, but...

61%

of CEOs haven’t yet taken the first step

PwC

94%

of employees stated that they would stay with a company longer if the company invested in their individual careers

49%

want to learn only when they need to learn

LinkedIn

For more information please visit [cornerstoneondemand.co.uk](https://cornerstoneondemand.co.uk)



## SOFT SKILLS

# Can you really teach workers soft skills?

The recent increase in demand for so-called soft skills, such as communication and adaptability, has been inevitable. How to equip workers with these skills, however, is less clear-cut

Jon Axworthy

It's an astonishing statistic, but the World Economic Forum recently estimated that 65 per cent of children currently in primary school would end up working in jobs that don't even exist today.

This stunning example of the rapidly changing professional landscape is an indication that it's the transferable skills which are going to become increasingly prized by employers. Also, there is going to be a greater emphasis on soft skills training as we move ahead into a work environment dominated by technology and automation.

And this soft skills revolution has already begun, with words like communication, adaptability, collaboration, leadership and even culture-fit sharing equal billing on CVs and LinkedIn profiles with the hard skills learnt through formal training.

There is good reason for this too. As a recent LinkedIn survey revealed 57 per cent of leaders say soft skills are actually more important than technical skills. But what are



10,000 Hours/Getty Images

those leaders doing to future-proof their workforce?

One of the keys to closing any soft skills gap in an organisation is to motivate the existing workforce to identify them for you.

"They need to take responsibility for their own career development, which is where personal branding comes in," says Stephanie Morgan, managing director of Bray Leino Learning, specialising in bespoke digital learning.

"When your learners are on board with the concept of 'Me PLC' they will identify themselves whether they have the core soft skills needed to succeed."

This also streamlines the process and ensures soft skills implementation is more closely aligned to the goals of the business.

Feedback will then inform what kind of coaching and soft skills training strategy needs to be in place, but these will only be



**Improved workplace communication and empathy are the most critical factors we've identified as we think about the future of work**

successful if you have the structure in place for it to thrive in the workplace. Using 360-degree feedback, where employees receive anonymous feedback from fellow workers, and internal coaching can produce the most significant performance boosts, according to research published by the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.

"Soft skills are best taught by creating a team of internal implementation specialists to support the transfer of learning in the workplace after the completion of a learning programme," says Ms Morgan. "This role could be performed by a learning and development team, HR or internal specialists."

And there is little doubt that soft skills can be taught. There is plenty of evidence that problem-solving, emotional intelligence, time management and even creativity can all be learnt through soft skills training programmes.

One of the keys to being successful is to ensure there is a feedback loop in place whereby workers can be evaluated, and evaluate for themselves, how their skill areas are developing. This can happen during the performance review process when resources can also be put in place to help them achieve a particular goal.

## Taking action

Some say people are hired for hard skills and fired for soft skills. However, in most organisations this thinking is now giving way to a mindset that values them equally, realising a soft skills gap will only lead to customer service issues, internal strife and high staff turnover down the line.

One company that has come to this conclusion is The Motley Fool, a renowned US multimedia financial services company based in Alexandria, Virginia.

Recruiting managers at the company have long been made aware of the importance of soft skills and there is a healthy culture of allowing employees to reach their potential by focusing on their soft skills when there is a hard skills failure.

An example of this was when an IT employee was struggling to get to grips with one of the new technologies the company is always seeking to install to ensure its relevancy in the media world. However, the team had already identified that this person was in possession of some good soft

skills and he was asked to move to a different role within the company, working more directly with their customer base.

He was coached in this new role by existing team members in that area and, rather than him losing his job and The Motley Fool losing an employee, he filled an opening that otherwise would have cost the company time and money to recruit for.

And the soft skills in play weren't just the employee's newfound people skills, but the adaptability and problem-solving used by the company's recruiting team.



Pricilla Du Prez/Unsplash

For example, if an individual has identified that public speaking is a soft skill that needs sharpening, then a plan can be put in place whereby they start leading more meetings, all within a safe-to-fail environment which will boost confidence.

A soft skills curriculum for the workplace can also be taught by example, making sure that everyone from high-profile executives to managers are all in receipt of the key skills the business values the most. One of the most effective ways to ensure new recruits or existing employees are in step with the personnel whose soft skills you want them to emulate is to rely on company mentorship programmes.

The good news is that leaders who possess soft skills, such as problem-solving, positive attitude, emotional intelligence and curiosity, are better equipped to instil those traits in others, particularly because they are more likely to listen to feedback so they can make changes. This can also inform the hiring process for these positions.

With this structure in place, productivity will rise as was shown in a study by the Hay Group that revealed managers who incorporate soft skills training into their leadership technique can increase team members' performance by as much as 30 per cent.

Interestingly, it's not just leadership and management that can close the soft skills gap of any organisation, and the hardest of skills, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, are being leveraged to improve soft skills training.

A cutting-edge tool from Californian company Talespin, which seeks to transform workforces using new technologies, harnesses artificial intelligence (AI) to create a situation whereby the soft skills of an employee can be evaluated and developed using software alone. Employees can interact with a virtual human who is programmed to improve their soft skills, using tools including natural language processing, speech recognition and AI to simulate realistic conversations.

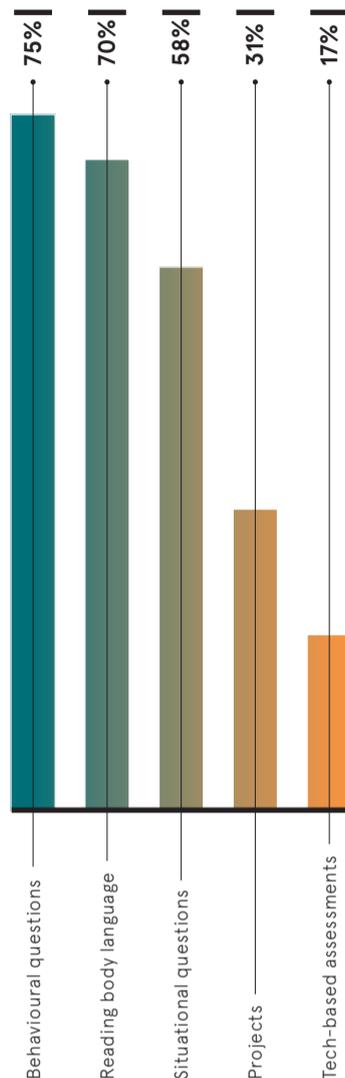
Kyle Jackson, chief executive and co-founder of Talespin, says: "Improved workplace communication and empathy are the most critical factors we've identified as we help organisations think about the future of work. We've developed our virtual human technology to help people better prepare for a rapidly changing workplace dynamic and evolving technology by improving their interpersonal skills."

This exciting new tool can be tailored to enable a business to incorporate the soft skills they prize into interactions with the virtual characters. Then, through scoring and direct feedback, a company can monitor an individual to see how they are developing those essential skills over time.

It's just another example of how a soft skills curriculum can be coached, and how established practices and some exciting emerging strategies can be put in place right now so the benefits can be felt by businesses sooner rather than later. ●

### MOST COMMON WAYS TO ASSESS SOFT SKILLS

Percentage of talent professionals who say their company uses the following to assess soft skills



LinkedIn 2019

# 92%

of talent professionals and hiring managers agree that candidates with strong soft skills are increasingly important

# 89%

feel that "bad hires" typically have poor soft skills

# 41%

have a formal process to assess soft skills

LinkedIn 2019

# Future-proof training with open source

According to LinkedIn's 2018 *Workplace Learning Report*, 90 per cent of executives understand the importance of learning and development to their organisations, yet only 33 per cent of talent developers would recommend their own model

**L**ack of support in the e-learning sector has left many learning and development (L&D) managers frustrated and struggling to implement an effective and engaging training programme. This is especially concerning as recruiting and retaining skilled employees is increasingly difficult in the present competitive job market.

Businesses are subsequently looking for guidance to create a culture of learning in the workplace that better supports, engages and continuously develops employees, ultimately resulting in improved business outcomes and minimised staff turnover rates.

eThink Education, the largest certified Moodle Partner worldwide and 2018 Global Totara Partner of the Year, is one such facilitator in L&D.

"In a corporate learning market that is booming, organisations are realising that L&D is a critical component in attracting and retaining top talent," says Brian Carlson, eThink chief executive. "Online training allows them to provide the engaging, accessible and cost-effective training that is required to advance personnel and the company as a whole."

eThink provides fully managed e-learning solutions for the open-source Moodle and Totara learning management systems (LMS). Through an unlimited support model, clients enjoy full access to L&D experts who are available to discuss e-learning trends, best practices and pedagogy, or to simply be a sounding board to help clients visualise their path to L&D success.

"To continually attract and develop talent, organisations need to create a culture of learning in their workplaces," says Mr Carlson. "eThink does this by providing a robust digital learning platform, best-of-breed content and a host of services that organisations need to transform their learning programmes and meet learning objectives."

“Organisations are realising that L&D is a critical component in attracting and retaining top talent



### Breaking the LMS mould

eThink's mission is centred entirely around making extraordinary LMS support the ordinary for their clients. This may seem like a given, but traditionally the LMS industry has fallen short of its responsibility from the perspective of customer service.

"The average L&D manager needs more than just a platform; they need consistent access to expertise around how to configure the platform to maximise learning and business outcomes," Mr Carlson explains. "It's been our company goal to flip the LMS model on its head, to break the mould, by putting service quality first."

Turnkey L&D solutions that provide platform, content and consultation is the way the industry is heading. More important still is the ability to customise this training solution so the platform, content and consultative facets are bespoke to each organisation, which is possible with a flexible learning platform that can also be future-proofed to meet the rapid changes frequently seen in the L&D industry.

### Future-proofing

Luckily, open-source platforms like Moodle and Totara provide the freedom you need when it comes to flexibility, customisation, interoperability and adaptability, all features necessary for your training programme to grow as your company scales or evolves alongside an ever-changing learning ecosystem.

Additionally, this flexibility allows you to use new technologies, tools and content in your existing training programmes as they appear in the market, without having to change products.

Mr Carlson concludes: "A future-proof workplace learning solution that can meet the training needs of each member of an organisation, regardless of department, location or where they are in the employee life cycle, is critical to improving business outcomes. And a flexible, customisable platform will continue to support a company's training programme as it scales and as needs evolve."

"The market has long been looking for a one-stop training platform-and-content combo that can effectively help companies attract, retain and manage their talent. eThink looks forward to helping more companies measurably benefit from their training and professional education investment."

Learn how you can future-proof your training programmes with open source on October 3, 2019 at 2pm. Register for the webinar [here](#).

eThink



## ‘L&D programmes should be in alignment with the employee’s long-term personal goals’

**I**t was reported earlier this year that around a third of UK businesses make absolutely no investment in learning and development (L&D). It’s a shocking statistic in this day and age. By looking across the market though there are lessons to be learnt from big companies and education that could benefit you if you’re looking to develop a plan for your business or department.

The last few years have seen an explosion in new approaches to workplace learning, especially at an enterprise level. Gone are the dry days of dull training sessions with little to no meaning for most workers. Functional training designed for many aspects of health and safety has moved to digital systems, reducing employee time away from being productive and providing companies with the ability to track full take-up and delegate understanding of the subject.

More importantly, companies have started to adopt a programme-focused learning management system (LMS) utilised by large education establishments. They are combining them with agile, high-quality training and development to deliver best-in-class experiences that are enriching the lives of the employee. They often far exceed the quality and range of learning that a university or college can offer. These courses and learning programmes are based on real-life needs and strategic objectives of businesses.

Sky is one such employer that has rolled out this new L&D approach. The media company has overhauled its training programme over the last 18 months, becoming more agile and tapping into the current trend for user-centric learning blended with marketing techniques to ensure employee adoption stays high.

In terms of LMS, increasingly this is being extended from education to employment, offering a school-to-working-life experience. Having employees joining a company that understands a platform on which they can develop their skills and record achievements can be compelling.

Of course, the big rush at the moment is to explore artificial intelligence (AI) in the context of L&D platforms. It’s enabling more and more companies to use the

analytics and insight generated by the user to deliver personalised learning experiences. These can help to progress them with minimal assistance and at a scale hitherto unknown. However, the current application of true AI in human resources (HR) is still quite small and we’re at the very earliest stages of the transformation.

Katarina Berg, the chief HR officer of Spotify, who spoke to us as part of UNLEASH World in Paris this October, evidences this. Her role is unique in being someone having access to Spotify’s internal systems for audience analytics and comparing these to those on offer for HR. She has shared with UNLEASH how many embryonic systems there actually are within HR.

The critical aspect of designing an L&D programme is that it should deliver value for both the employee and the employer. Learning is best taken on board when it can be put into practice straight away. So within an organisation, when developing plans, you should be taking stock of what aspects you’ll expect to see the employee picking up, or improving in, straight away. L&D programmes should be in alignment with the employee’s long-term personal goals.

Well-structured L&D programmes have consistently shown they can drive up retention, ratings, revenues and return on investment. If you’re one of the 99 per cent of small business in the UK, there’s a wealth of organisations that can support you with free L&D for you and your teams. Many councils support local enterprise with free resources and the Duke of York’s iDEA programme is one example of an excellent tool for self-initiated learning.



**Marc Coleman**  
Chief executive  
unleashgroup.io



### EMPLOYEES

# How learner-led training can ignite employee development

Organisations are increasingly choosing to move away from top-down strategies and empower employees by using a more learner-centred approach to workplace learning and development

Suchandrika Chakrabarti

**L**inkedIn’s *2019 Workplace Learning Report* reveals that more than 58 per cent of employees want to learn at their own pace depending on their personal requirements, needs and interests.

“Workplace fulfilment and personal development are becoming just as important as salaries and bonuses,” says Hannah Elderfield, senior behavioural analyst at Canvas8. “In fact, almost half of generation Y say they would consider leaving a job that doesn’t offer them learning opportunities.”

But generation Y are not the only age group in the workplace, and organisational learning and development (L&D) programmes have to cover a wide age range and evolve in response to feedback as well as to management decisions.

“It’s a slow change,” Richard Coombes, leader of human resources transformation at Deloitte, concedes. “In our *Voice of the Workforce* report, 50 per cent of employees who thought they needed to reskill saw it as the responsibility of their employer. Only 18 per cent thought it was their individual responsibility.

“With longer life expectancies, frequent job changes, an accelerating rate of skills obsolescence,

new business models and changes in technology, this has to change. The balance of responsibility has to be shared between employee and employer.”

“**Almost half of generation Y say they would consider leaving a job that doesn’t offer them learning opportunities**”

That equilibrium can be maintained by offering employees a learner-centred approach to workplace education, through a mix of in-office teaching and online learning.

This can be a great way to empower employees to learn at their own pace, according to Sameer Bhatia, founder and chief executive of ProProfs. “With an online classroom, employers can

assign training courses and employees can take them at their own pace. This empowers them to schedule learning according to how they like to work,” he says.

Over the past six years, the number of C-suites appointing chief learning officers (CLOs) has soared by 900 per cent, according to AVADO’s *Transformation in the C-Suite* report.

“The need to embrace digital transformation from the top down is more crucial today than ever before,” says Niall McKinney, global president of AVADO. “C-suite titles in these influential companies serve as a bellwether for how rapidly and effectively companies recognise the need to expand the skillsets of their leadership teams.”

The rise of the CLO suggests that more attention will be paid to creating a learner-centred approach to L&D, but only if senior management buys into the idea. “Embodying the voice of the workforce is the responsibility of the entire C-suite,” says Mr Coombes. “Of course, the CLO can help, but it needs to be owned by the whole board. As workers now rate the opportunity to learn as among their top reasons for taking a job, it is the responsibility of the CLO to translate this desire for business leaders and to integrate it into the organisation’s talent strategy.”

Liz Johnson, co-founder and managing director of The Ability People (TAP), says: “A good CLO should act as a bridge between the workforce and the C-suite level. However, a company’s core values and mission should permeate the whole organisation, no matter the level. If you want to see any real shift or culture change, you need to ensure employees at every level are on the same page.”



Designing a training programme for employees can be complex, even before considering a learner-centred approach. “It’s not so much about pre-planned ‘lunch and learns’, but more about integrating these opportunities into the day-to-day tasks so that L&D becomes part and parcel of the job,” says Ms Elderfield. “What’s more, with 34 per cent of British employees working through their lunch every day, it’s a big ask to expect them to dedicate their own free time to L&D.”

An L&D strategy underpinned by technology can empower workers. Mr Coombes notes: “With the proliferation of cloud-connected mobile

and wearable devices, and the introduction of augmented reality devices, organisations will be able to explore new approaches to virtual learning in small doses throughout the day, and in a format that will allow workers to learn as and when they see fit, personalising the learning experience.”

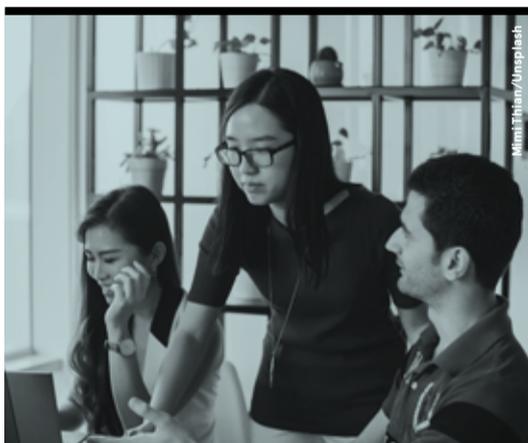
The data from online learning modules can help with the ever-evolving problem of how to identify individuals’ L&D needs. “Virtual classrooms make it easy to create a personalised learning path for each individual based on their individual requirements and needs,” says Mr Bhatia.

“The more people you have to train, the more important it is to have an L&D programme that scales. It is so much easier to grow your company when you can quickly and easily assign critical courses to different groups of employees.”

Mr Coombes points to Deloitte’s 2019 *Global Human Capital Trends* survey, which found that 77 per cent of respondents are leaning towards the development of the existing workforce over acquiring new talent. “This means organisations need to move to a new model for learning development, integrating learning and work,” he says.

This is why a learner-centred approach is so important. As Ms Elderfield says: “If employees are able to decide their paths, they’re much more likely to be able to draw upon the resiliency and motivation required to achieve truly remarkable things.”

An effective training programme for employees creates “a more empowered and better-trained workforce”, Mr Bhatia concludes, and the resulting uptick in productivity will benefit the whole company. ●



### Conscious inclusion

The US division of recruitment giant Randstad last year revamped its diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts. One element of this was to redesign internal training and rename it Conscious Inclusion, restructuring it as an interactive programme designed to educate employees to recognise their own biases that can impact

inclusion, according to the company’s chief D&I officer Audra Jenkins.

The programme, which must be completed by all US-based employees, automatically enrolls staff in training through bite-sized relatable scenarios, via videos and short modules. It enables a more self-driven approach and increases engagement compared to more traditional L&D programmes, says Ms Jenkins.

The company deployed gamification methods, which it says helped drive participation. As employees complete each section of the video, they are then provided with matching, puzzle-like games that reinforce key learnings and enable them to reflect on how they would approach each diversity challenge presented.

Ms Jenkins says the Conscious Inclusion training is helping the company to shape its culture. She says: “It has a positive impact on our employee engagement, while demonstrating Randstad’s ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion by providing a workplace where everyone is welcomed, valued and part of our overall success.”

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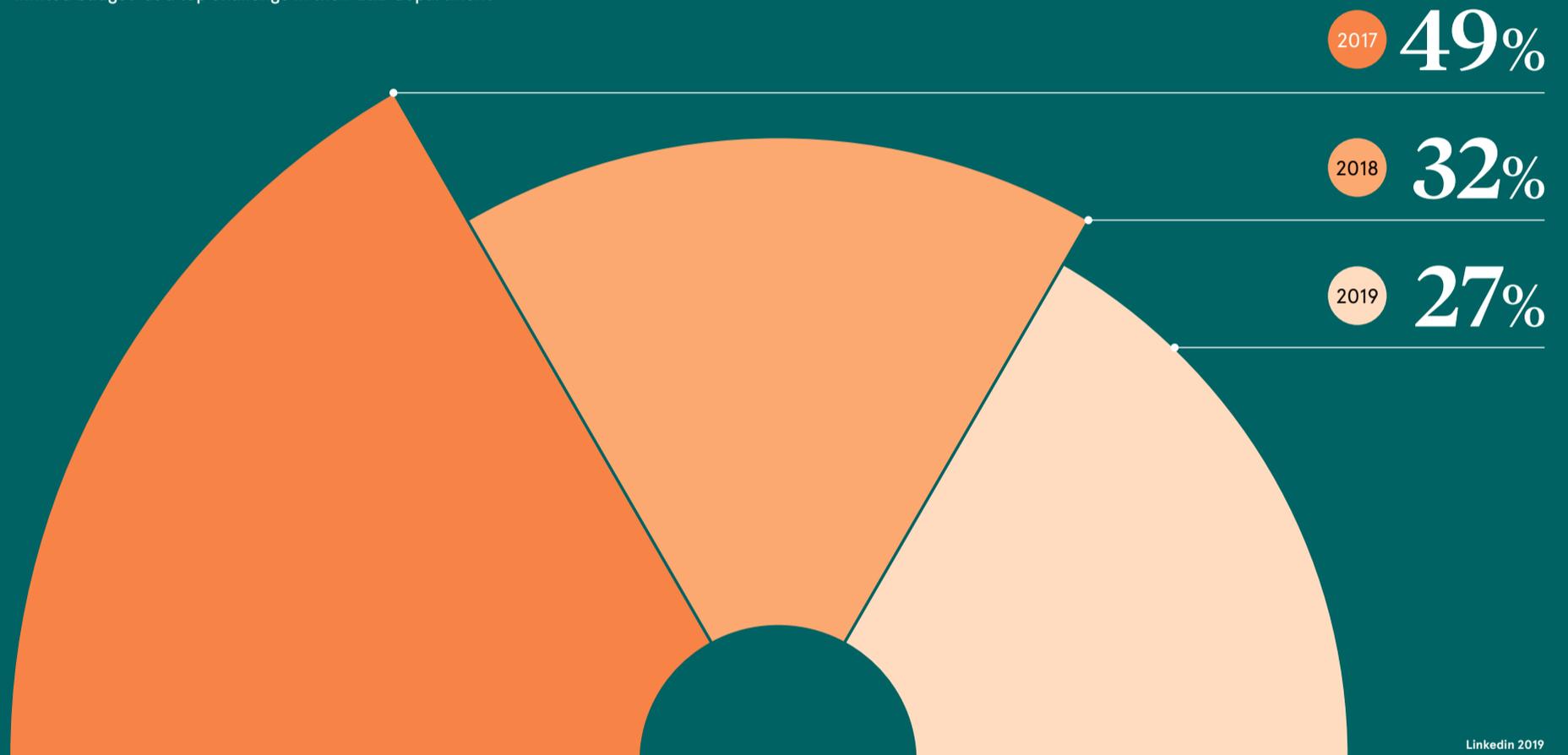
# 9 WAYS THE L&D FUNCTION IS EVOLVING

As workers increasingly demand that education and training be integral to their jobs, the nature of workplace learning and development is changing, and receiving a lot more attention in the boardroom

## 1

### BUDGET RESTRAINTS ARE REDUCING

Percentage of global talent developers who rated 'limited budget' as a top challenge in their L&D department

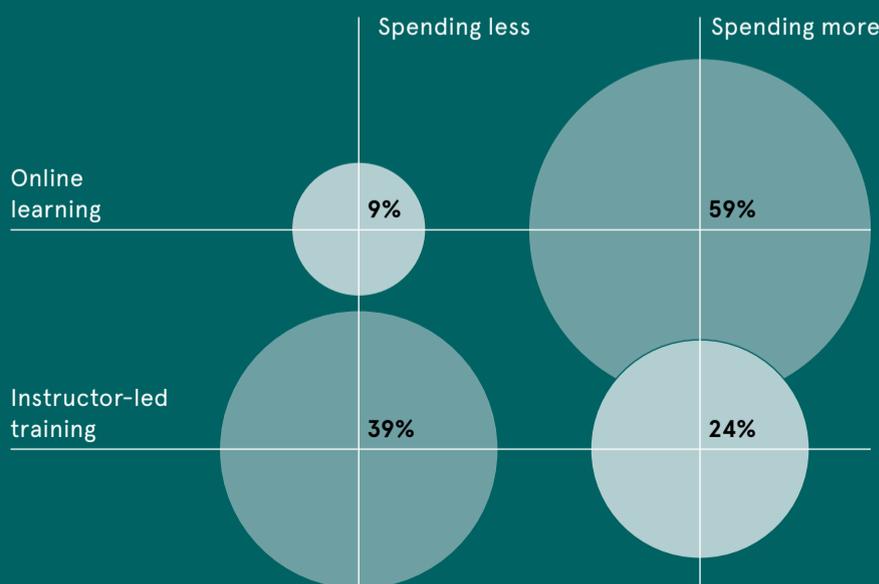


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## 2

### BUDGETS ARE CHANGING

Percentage of global talent developers who say they are spending more or less on the following compared with three years ago

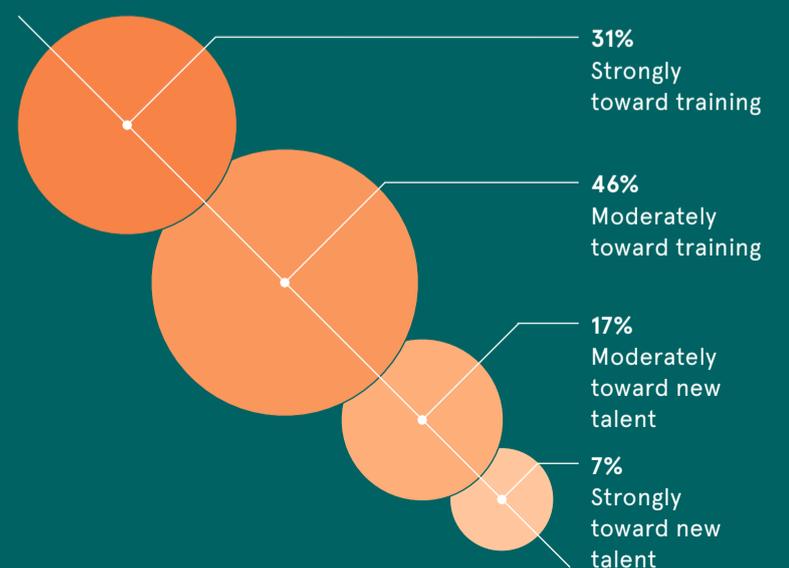


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## 3

### TRAINING BEATS HIRING

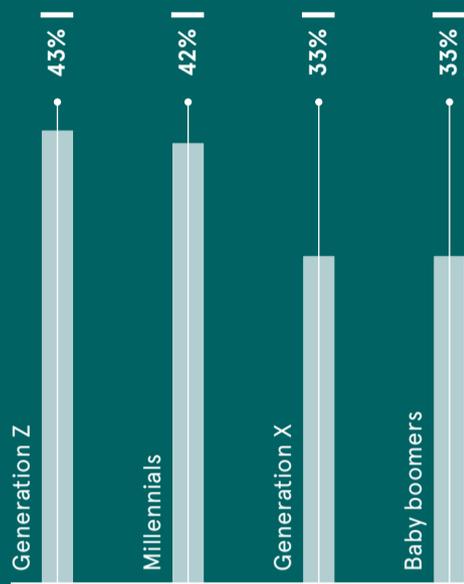
Areas where HR and workplace leaders expect to focus on given the choice between accessing new talent and training existing employees



Deloitte 2019

## 4 YOUNGER WORKERS WANT MORE CONTROL

Percentage of workplace learners who want fully self-directed and independent learning

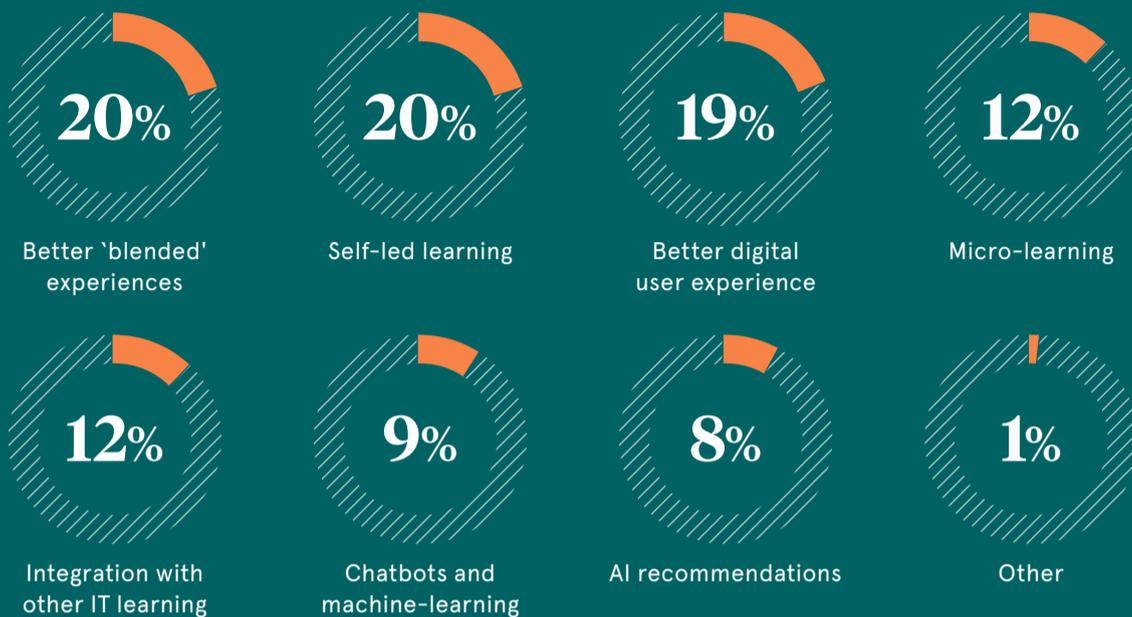


LinkedIn 2019

## 5 FACTORS DRIVING DIGITAL LEARNING

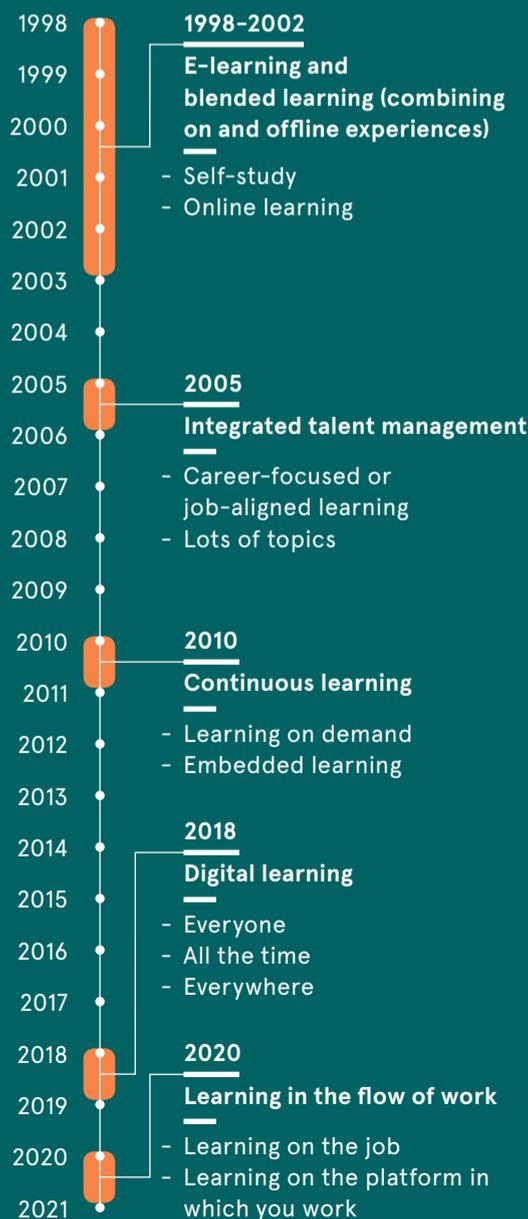
Percentage of L&D professionals who believe the following will accelerate digital learning the most over the next two to three years

Hemsley Fraser 2019



## 6 LEARNING METHODS CHANGE AS WORKPLACE L&D EVOLVES

How L&D methods have changed over the past two decades, based on Josh Bersin's analysis, 'A New Paradigm For Corporate Training: Learning In The Flow of Work'



Josh Bersin 2018

## 7 SKILLS GAP CONCERNS ARE GROWING

Percentage of global chief executives who are concerned about the availability of key skills

PwC 2019



## 8 EMPLOYEES ARE AWARE OF THEIR SKILLS GAPS

Survey of 7,000 employees self-assessing their level of proficiency of in-demand skills

70%

said they haven't mastered the skills they need for their jobs today

80%

said they lack both the skills they need both for their current role and their future career

Gartner 2018

## 9 SOME BARRIERS STILL PERSIST

Percentage of L&D professionals who see the following as a challenge



CIPD 2019



## L&amp;D DEPARTMENT

# In search of L&D's place within a business

Whether learning and development should reside within human resources or alongside as its own empowered business unit remains a contentious issue

## Peter Crush

For what seems like years now, there have been heated conversations among human resources (HR) professionals about their strategic place in the business, not least whether they have a right to sit at the top table or still have to earn it. All the while, dutiful learning and development (L&D) professionals have been quietly getting on with the job of doing HR's bidding. But is all this set to change?

In PwC's 20th *Global CEO Survey*, 77 per cent of chief executives believe the availability of skills is their biggest business worry. In fact, it's so severe that 60 per cent say they're actively rethinking their HR function to solve it. So could the answer be right there in front of them that, given a choice between HR and L&D, they should go direct to the experts for their counsel, to L&D itself?

The logic is certainly appealing. "Progressive L&D no longer needs to wait for permission to measure against performance and outcomes, and present learning as a strategic

business concern," argues Matt Ash, head of learning at creative agency Media Zoo. "At a time when business success is based on the agility of its people to demonstrably upskill, it feels like L&D's time has come."

But it's also a view that divides opinion, the fault line around which is whether L&D should work with HR as a duo of force at the board or whether L&D should become a strategic spun-off discipline in its own right.

"It's fair to say most L&D departments are currently part of HR and not on an equal footing with it," says Simon Ashton, head of L&D at Phoenix Leaders.

Nick Jankel, author of *Switch On: Unleash Your Creativity* and C-suite L&D specialist to the likes of Intel and HSBC, says even people with chief learning officer titles tend to report to HR "often because many human resources directors want to present

L&D as theirs and because they don't often have an L&D background of their own".

He adds: "Even though the CEO and L&D are actually aligned in their thinking, they're sometimes so many rungs removed that they don't get to speak to each other."

Mr Jankel notes it's ironic that L&D professionals facilitate leadership for others, but don't develop their own leadership skills, which is vital if they are to step up.

Others suggest the idea that L&D should somehow free itself from HR isn't practical. "While L&D generally doesn't fight its corner as much as it probably should, neither can it go rogue," says Stuart Duff, chartered business psychologist and head of development at Pearn Kandola. "HR and L&D must work together. A healthy people function has to have connection between the two."

Mr Duff believes L&D should focus on assessing people potential and talent development, but then present post-learning metrics before partnering up with HR to put forward a solid case.

It's a view not lost on others. "L&D spends 80 per cent of its time delivering," says Jo Taylor, former head of learning and talent at Channel 4 and now managing director of Let's Talk Talent. "My challenge is for it to move more into business performance and predicting learning success," she says. "Enlightened HR should also understand they'll get further working in parallel with L&D too."

This advice couldn't be more prescient. A recent report by Towards Maturity found only 31 per cent of L&D managers currently work with business leaders to identify the skills they want to improve.

Ms Taylor adds: "What L&D really has to do is demand to know the vision of the business, so they can feed their insight into it. L&D professionals don't set out to be operational, but unless they push for inclusion, they do risk remaining a cash-rich, training delivery function."

Signs that more HR and L&D departments are working collaboratively together can be seen. Lindsay Bridges, board director and senior vice president of HR at DHL, says the head of its leadership development programme reports directly to the board.

"There is now recognition that learning needs to be strongly

“It's fair to say most L&D departments are currently part of HR and not on an equal footing with it

business focused," she says. "Even though the UK L&D team reports through HR, what's unique is the fact senior management is so engaged in the learning and it definitely elevates L&D higher than it would otherwise be.

"HR and L&D must have conversations as equals. When I sat down to devise our core HR pillars for 2019, one of which is improving core capability, we also sat with L&D to talk about how to achieve it."

In rare organisations, L&D is a business function that ranks higher than HR. "Our entire business is predicated on hiring the best and then developing them," says Chris Birtle, head of training and development at Heat Recruitment. "I'm probably a bit different from other L&D professionals in that I've come up from a sales background. As such, I work very closely with the sales director, setting the culture of the business and how we're going to improve business results with our talent development plans. HR, meanwhile, tends to stick to policy and procedure."

His position is cemented, he says, because he provides the return on investment data the rest of the business demands. "An area we tackled recently was the fact that 22 per cent of people accepting the role we placed them in would then drop out, which was disheartening for our own staff, but also our clients too. We redressed this with additional L&D and we've now seen this fall to 17 per cent, equivalent to a £0.25-million cost-reduction."

The message, it seems, is clear. When L&D has its finger on the business pulse, and has HR's backing, it really is a function to be reckoned with. ●

## IMPACT OF SKILLS GAPS ON THE WIDER BUSINESS

Global survey of chief executives



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"As entrepreneurs, we needed smarter, quicker, better information," Mr Brigger explains. "We wanted to have instant access to all the knowledge contained in the business books on our bookshelves. And we knew we could make that knowledge accessible and useful to others as well."

This realisation led Mr Brigger, with Mr Bergen and their third co-founder, best-selling author Rolf Dobelli, to launch getAbstract, an online library of concise business book summaries.

"When we started, only one other firm was offering book summaries, and only in print, in limited quantity and from a handful of publishers," says Mr Brigger, who recognised an unmet demand. "We took a chance and never looked back."

Now getAbstract is the world's largest library of compressed knowledge, featuring more than 20,000 summaries of business books, articles, podcasts and videos. It has become a preferred learning solution for corporate and individual customers worldwide.

## World's best business content

Almost 21 years later, Mr Brigger is proud of what getAbstract has achieved. The company finds, rates and summarises the world's best business content to enable users to learn quickly, efficiently and flexibly, wherever they are and from any device.

"We select and summarise our content in a completely unbiased and neutral fashion," he explains, adding jokingly: "We are Swiss, after all."

The company's editors curate their selections based on quality, innovation and applicability, drawing from the work of more than 600 publishing partners. The editors constantly scour websites, catalogues, magazines, newspapers, book fairs and bookstores to find the best content.

The world of learning and development (L&D) has undergone major transformations since 1999, yet getAbstract has been able to keep pace by continuing to provide clients with outstanding, up-to-date content. getAbstract clients, often companies with thousands of employees, reap the benefit of continuous learning, which enables them to be more innovative in a fast-moving and unpredictable business environment.

"The challenge for many L&D departments is that changes happen extremely quickly; what you learnt yesterday is not necessarily what you need to know today," says Mr Brigger. And this is where he sees the most promising opportunities.

## Learning workers and leaders

Business guru Peter Drucker coined the term "knowledge workers" to describe highly skilled employees who apply their knowledge to develop sophisticated products and services. The phrase is now commonplace in management jargon, but Mr Brigger says he prefers to use the terms "learning workers" and "learning leaders".

"L&D solutions often focus on developing workplace skills, but employees need, and often want, a broader perspective, which includes solutions that allow them to develop themselves holistically," he says. "Moreover, it's important to extend personal knowledge beyond existing

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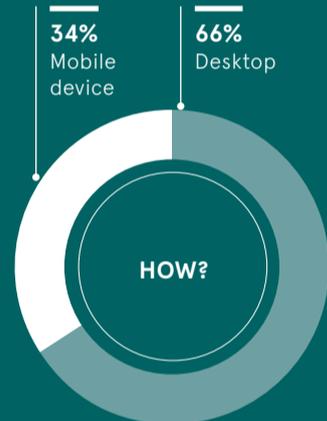
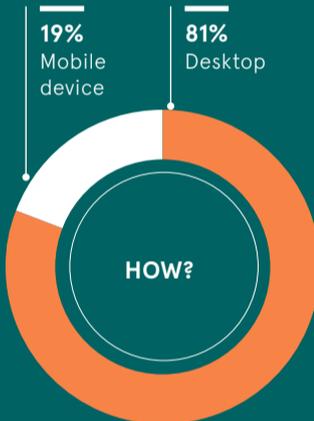
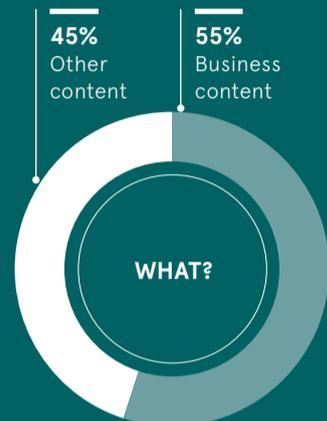
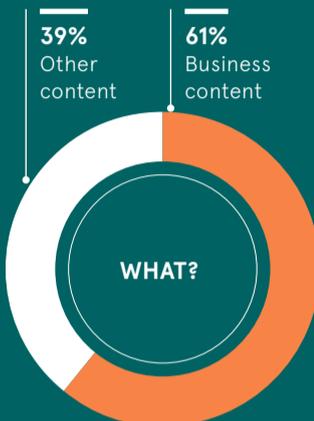


of reading happens during office hours

32%



of reading happens outside of work



**The challenge for many L&D departments is that changes happen extremely quickly; what you learnt yesterday is not necessarily what you need to know today**

boundaries. L&D needs to foster an urge for curiosity and then be able to satisfy that curiosity in various areas."

## Pushing boundaries

To succeed in a world shaped by unprecedentedly rapid change, Mr Brigger maintains you have to think creatively and curiously, both on a corporate and personal level, while constantly envisioning what the next innovation might look like.

"We're always thinking about our customers, how their habits and needs are changing in tandem with the world around them," he says. "We strive to make knowledge accessible to everyone everywhere, regardless of how much time they have. We know people are busy, but that shouldn't

prevent them from learning, even if that means reading or listening to content for five quick minutes on a mobile device in an airport lounge."

In its quest to serve global needs, getAbstract provides summaries in English, German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Mandarin Chinese. Its multi-language libraries are unique in the world of business and global companies among their customers, such as Microsoft, welcome having an extensive bank of information that everyone in their international workforce can share.

getAbstract is committed to helping the next generation of leaders seize their opportunities and understand their challenges. As part of a new initiative, getAbstract now offers students free access to its online library, a public service embraced at once by students worldwide.

## Beyond business

While getAbstract's primary aim is to educate on business matters, Mr Brigger is acutely aware of how interconnected the world has become. He's adamant that to foster a deep understanding of a subject like business, you must have a solid grasp of the scientific, political and economic forces which shape global affairs.

"We offer the hands-on, skill-based information that learning workers need, like how to be personally

## TOP READS

01

*The Introverted Leader*  
Berrett-Koehler, 2018

02

*The Now Habit*  
Tarcher Perigee, 2007

03

*To-Do List Formula*  
The Art of Productivity, 2016

04

*Making Up Your Own Mind*  
Princeton UP, 2019

05

*This Messy Magnificent Life*  
Scribner, 2018

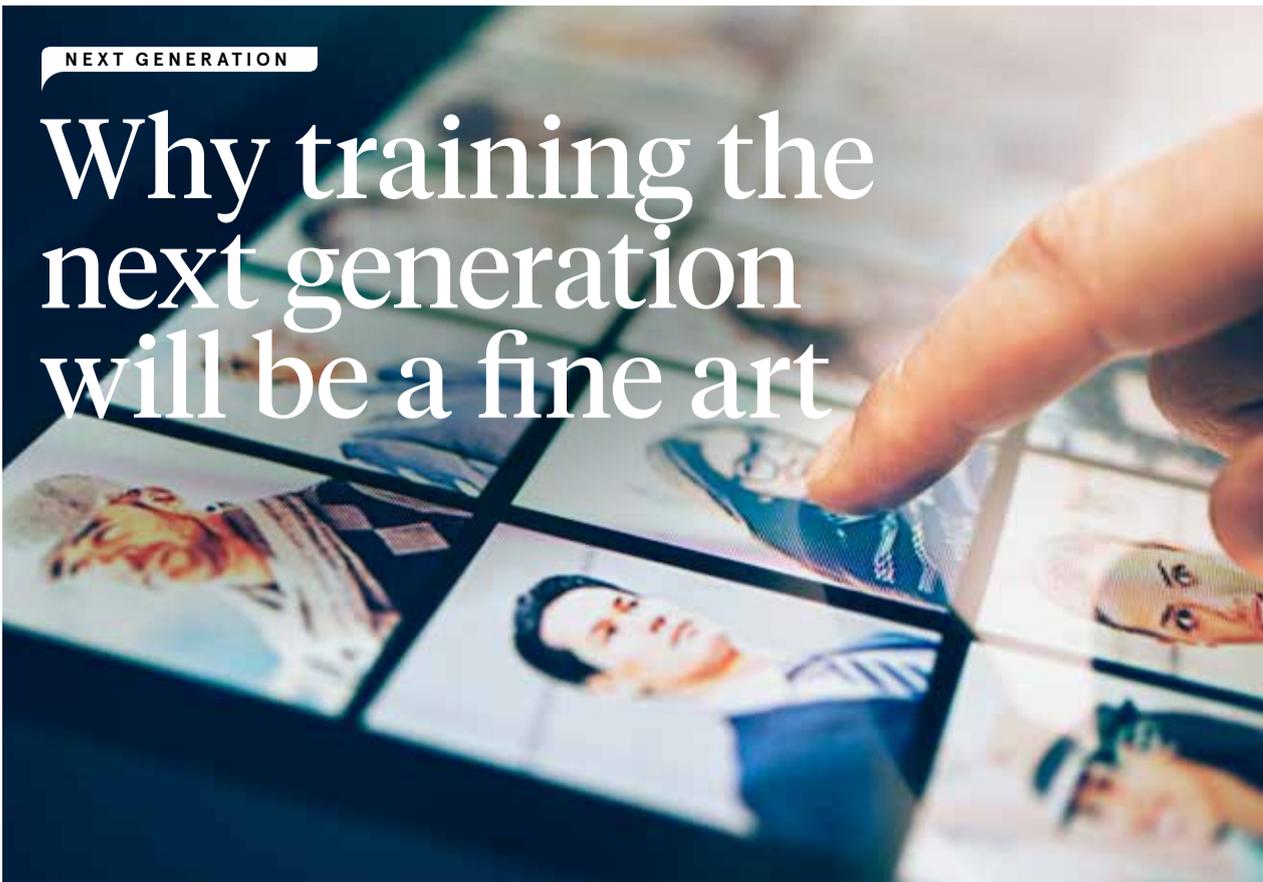
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Patrick Brigger and Thomas Bergen, founders of getAbstract

For more information please visit [www.getabstract.com](http://www.getabstract.com)





NEXT GENERATION

# Why training the next generation will be a fine art

Understanding the needs and expectations of generation Z, the latest cohort to enter the workforce, is vital if you are to get the best out of your employees

Daniel Thomas

As any smart employer knows, workplace learning and development (L&D) is vital to nurturing and retaining your most valued staff. Yet organisations are having to rethink their entire approach when it comes to teaching generation Z learners. Born between the mid-1990s and early-2000s, this cohort has grown up in the digital age with apps and instant messaging on tap and Facebook, YouTube, Google and Amazon as their lodestars. Naturally, they expect services they receive elsewhere in life to be just as consumer friendly, flexible, personalised and engaging, and that includes education. Corporate training has had to evolve to meet these needs, but still has a way to go. As research from the digital learning consultancy Ludic found, more than a quarter (26 per cent) of employees

do not feel in-work L&D is personalised enough. So how do employers craft effective training for this group? Andy Lancaster, head of L&D at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), concedes that it's a challenge because of this demographic's expectation of instant communication and collaboration. "They've been weaned on apps and are independent, so you need to have learning experiences that reflect that. They also have shorter attention spans, so you need to think of learning in bite-size chunks," he says. Most importantly, they do not view technology as something they use, but part of who they are and that applies equally in the workplace. For this reason employers have been turning to mobile and social networks and more adventurous edtech tools that use things such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence to create

more immersive and responsive learning experiences. One of the biggest trends has been gamification, perhaps in a nod to the huge success of video games among the millennial and gen Z cohorts. But it is also about building the idea of competition into workplace learning. Advocates say gamification allows learners to test ideas in safe scenarios, and rewards participation and contribution. But Doug Stephen, senior vice president of the learning division at CGS, an American corporate training provider, is not convinced. He says gamification has been top

of many firms' wish lists, but could "lose a bit of its lustre" in 2019. "Game mechanics often prioritise winning over other objectives and gamification alone cannot meet the needs of a diversified business. For gamification to be successful, it needs to be supplemented with other L&D programmes," says Mr Stephen. CIPD's Mr Lancaster agrees gamification is just one of many useful learning tools available to firms and, despite gen Z's tech savviness, more traditional methods such as face-to-face classes are still highly effective. One of the most popular techniques to have seen a resurgence over the last few years is so-called social learning, which at its essence is the continuous process of learning from your colleagues. This might mean getting staff to write blogs, starting internal discussion forums or creating micro-videos or podcasts featuring colleagues providing expert advice. A company offering social learning solutions is US platform Panopto, which helps firms to record, live stream and share their own L&D videos across the organisation. That might mean getting a sales rep in the field to use their smartphone to record newly discovered information or tactics their colleagues can use during upcoming sales calls. Or it could mean getting your firm's technical support staff to use smart-glasses to record a hands-on view of installing complicated equipment so new technicians can familiarise themselves with the technology. As Panopto points out, the main benefit of a social learning environment is it enables employees to take responsibility for their own personal learning while leveraging the expertise around them. It can also be done on a just-in-time basis,

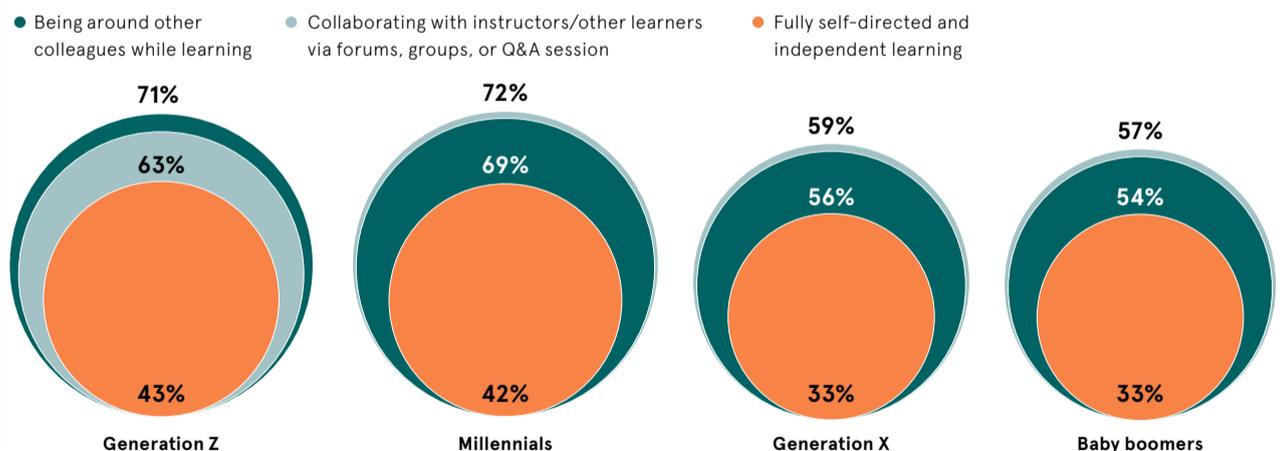
“It’s not just about gen Z, it’s about how all our lives are changing and how organisations mirror that in the workplace”

so learners get exactly the information they need at the point they need it. This works well for gen Zers who are used to receiving things on demand. Hundreds of millions of gen Z employees are set to enter the workforce over the next few decades and, as research shows, they are less likely to be loyal to their employers and more likely to switch careers than previous generations. So while offering the right sort of training for this group may prove challenging, getting it right is vital. Mr Lancaster says firms will need a mix of solutions to achieve their goals and should invite learners to be part of the design of any training programme. It's important to remember that the influence of gen Z has already stretched beyond the cohort itself and is affecting workers of all ages. "It's not just about gen Z, it's about how all our lives are changing in a more general sense and how organisations mirror that in the workplace," Mr Lancaster concludes. "We now access information in a completely different way and L&D has to reflect that." ●

## WHAT DIFFERENT GENERATIONS WANT FROM L&D

LinkedIn 2019

Global survey on what different generations value from workplace learning programmes



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# Learning to make a difference

At a time of huge uncertainty for business, one thing is certain: learning and development will continue to evolve, says **Richard Townsend**, chief executive of digital training company Circus Street

**T**he world of work is changing. Against a backdrop of the fourth industrial revolution and digital transformation so too is the way employees acquire the skills and knowledge they need to stay abreast of that change and deliver their best performance.

According to human resources analyst Josh Bersin, 80 per cent of all companies rate their business as complex or highly complex for their employees, who therefore need new skills or training to stay relevant in an increasingly always-on digital world.

However, employees also have less time. Research from Bersin by Deloitte found that in a given week employees take less than 25 minutes of time to learn. In a shifting business landscape, the window within which people can realistically learn is really small. That's the environment in which learning is trying to flourish and that's why it needs to be engaging.

## Learning that works

Understanding how learning works in their organisation and the type of learning they should be creating is a huge challenge for business leaders. The days of traditional classroom-based group training sessions are over; the one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work.

Now employees engage with learning and development that is tailored to their individual needs, flexible,

available on demand and delivering "snackable" content. It also has to be fun and easy to apply.

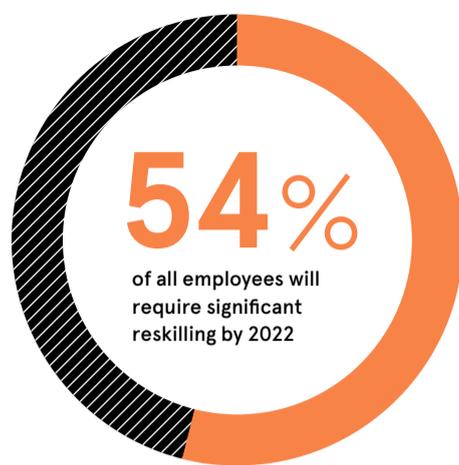
The Canadian philosopher and communications theorist Marshall McLuhan once said: "Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either."

For Circus Street, a company that has been described as the "Netflix of learning", this has been a guiding principle.

Historically, companies started to use online learning because it was cost effective. It got lots of people up to speed on things like compliance and health and safety very quickly.

However, the motivation for employees to complete the training was often the threat of getting fired if they didn't. In addition, people's experience of online learning has been quite poor, so it needed to be reinvented and transformed into something that can be applied to more business-critical subjects which people will engage with and apply to their role.

Modern learning solutions recognise that truly mastering a subject means putting what you've learnt into practice. Learning has the most impact when it is most required. And with digital learning you can offer a greater variety of content to lots of different users and enable them to access it in multiple environments, on a train, at home, on smartphones and at the very moment when it is most beneficial.



US hiring managers believe that implementing development programmes will prepare them for future disruptions or innovations



World Economic Forum/Capgemini/McKinsey/Salesforce

Done well, this generates high levels of engagement because it is valuable for both the employee and the business.

## Age is no barrier to learning

While the assumption is younger digital natives will race ahead of their older colleagues in applying digital learning to their job, that's not always the case.

At Circus Street, we work with organisations that now have five or six generations of employees to engage with learning. There is a common perception that older employees find technology a barrier to learning, but that's not the case if technology is simple and easy

to use. And as the employees with the most experience, they have many skills their younger peers don't yet possess.

We found that when older employees, who are experienced in the core subjects, were introduced to digital learning, they were able to put this new knowledge into context and apply it to their jobs much faster. Yes, younger people know a lot about technology, but without that deeper knowledge of the core subjects, such as sales, marketing and management, it can take them longer to apply their digital learning.

## Benefits of continuous learning

In this age of digital transformation, creating a continuous learning environment is more important than ever and this has led many learning and development functions across organisations to become much more strategic, ensuring learning is tailored to the needs of the organisation and, crucially, engages the learner.

Initially, an effective learning and development strategy is derived from the needs of the business, leading to the creation of a learning culture and learning programmes to meet those business objectives. Learning that is closely aligned to business objectives is more easily aligned to the objectives of individual employees in relation to their role or position in a team.

Businesses that invest in this type of learning expect to see a return. The clients we work with have a clear set of desired outcomes, for example, raising the floor in terms of injecting knowledge into the business, raising the ceiling in terms of increasing performance in specific areas, driving innovation, and attracting and retaining top talent.

## Tracking development

For each of these desired outcomes, we identify a set of trackable behaviours and changes that as a result of our learning programmes lead to those goals. For example, in raising the floor of knowledge, a trackable change could be increased confidence levels. In raising the ceiling of knowledge, it might be improvements to the way solutions are

implemented. With talent retention, the changes would be higher employee engagement, lower attrition rates and higher quality hires.

At a time of great uncertainty for business, it is at least certain that learning and development will continue to evolve, becoming increasingly decentralised, with people finding a multitude of ways to access learning content, for example, online via YouTube and Wikipedia, and by sharing information with colleagues.

However, alongside this deconstructed in-the-workflow-style learning model, companies will also need structured, co-ordinated digital learning programmes that bring everyone up to speed on certain things. We will see a combination of learning styles and higher quality, engaging, structured learning programmes that really connect with the learner. All this will lead to the Experience API (xAPI), a digital software specification that records, tracks and co-ordinates all types of learning experiences.

## Future learning strategies

As Guillermo Miranda, chief learning officer at IBM, said: "The learning architecture of today is like digital marketing. It embraces many types of content, collects data interactions and activities, uses intelligent systems to promote content and monitor employee usage, and is personalised for every job function."

It's an analogy that resonates with Circus Street. And in helping businesses to upskill and future-proof their workforce, it is how we operate.

“  
**Understanding how learning works in organisations is a huge challenge for business leaders. The 'one-size-fits-all' approach doesn't work anymore**

## CASE STUDY: BAYER

Bayer AG is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world; their consumer health division is a leading supplier of over-the-counter products from digestive health to painkillers, travel health to skincare.

**1,169** learners  
**8,000** learning hours  
**15,834** lessons completed

## The challenge

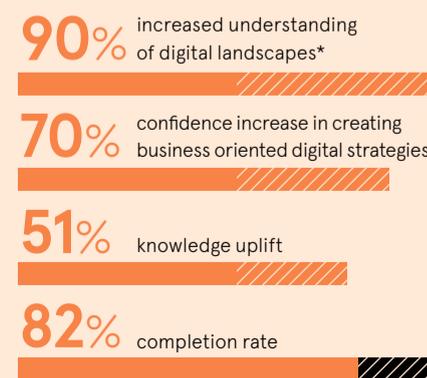
To upskill 1,200 consumer health marketing, sales and support employees and increase the digital capacity of the business

## Programme objectives

- 1 Build confidence of digital technologies and jargon
- 2 Better understand how to manage digital channels
- 3 Be able to discuss the implementation of digital strategy with agencies and/or digital leads

## Programme results

\*Circus Street



For more information please visit [circusstreet.com](https://circusstreet.com)





# Building a learning culture for the future of work

As the work and jobs landscape continues to transform, it's crucial companies embrace a learning culture and adopt new ways of training their workforce

**B**usinesses are faced with an unprecedented number of disruptions impacting their workforce. Automation is threatening to displace jobs, new employment models are emerging and there is a growing expectation for social transparency. The result is an urgent need for companies to reimagine their organisational structures.

In a recent study by human resources (HR) consulting firm Mercer, three quarters of HR leaders predicted significant industry disruption in the next three years, up from just one in four who said the same last year. More than half of the HR departments surveyed believed artificial intelligence (AI) and automation will replace one in five of their organisation's current jobs by 2022.

During the same time period, however, the World Economic Forum anticipates that AI and automation will create 58 million net new jobs. With unemployment at historical lows in the

UK and United States, and a growing digital skills gap, the solution must be to retrain and upskill current employees rather than looking to a limited talent pool to replace them.

"The idea that AI may be displacing workers in certain industries is a clear disruptor," says Mike Owens, chief executive of Absorb Software. "But in the midst of an exacerbating skills shortage, it just doesn't make sense to look to fulfil resourcing needs with external talent when very few good people are unemployed and particularly when you have staff who could be reskilled to be productive in different ways."

Adding to the challenge are the evolving ways in which staff are employed by businesses. The cost of labour and need for specialised skills have driven organisations to meet employment needs through contractors and offshore companies. Meanwhile, the emergence of gig workers, who are hired for short-stint projects, has

created a far more distributed workforce that can result in non-employees interacting with customers.

"You need to make sure the customer experience remains consistent with the company's mission and brand values," says Mr Owens. "Being able to train distributed workers to not only meet compliance regulations and feel connected enough to the customer,

but also fully understand the purpose of the company is a huge challenge."

As companies face up to the trends transforming the future of work, it's increasingly clear that a learning culture is a central component in the new definition of business success, enabling the flexibility and agility needed to thrive in the digital age.

"Recognise that learning and development is advantageous to both them and the competitiveness of the company," he says. "Creating a learning culture must be driven from the top down, while also providing the right infrastructure to support it from the bottom up. Encourage employees to carve out time in their day to engage in micro-learning and provide a learning platform that enables peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, content creation, tracking and feedback."

Keeping employees engaged in learning also means understanding how its delivery has evolved. The days when people would go to listen to subject matter experts through instructor-led training programmes are fading. The ubiquity of personal computers initiated the concept of e-learning, whereby courses were delivered online, while the YouTube generation gave birth to micro-learning. Digital learning solutions now fuse instructor-led training with e-learning and more in a cacophony of formats and styles that learners require.

The latter allows anybody to learn very much in the moment of what they were doing by simply searching for short, easily digestible content concerning what they need to know. Much of this content is generated by consumers themselves by capturing and sharing their own knowledge on a particular topic with the world. The key to

## 58%

of business professionals want to learn at their own pace

## 49%

want to learn in the flow of work

LinkedIn

perfecting a learning culture is taking that notion and integrating it into the workplace in ways that deliver for both the worker and the business.

"These micro-learning experiences have been pervasive in the consumer world and are also very effective, engaging ways of learning in the flow of your job," says Mr Owens. "By populating easily digestible videos, tips or other content inside the platforms that workers live in, such as Salesforce for large sales organisations, companies can transform learning from being a destination to being completely aligned to tasks."

Absorb Software provides a learning platform that empowers organisations to embrace learning and promote it in their environment. It has a traditional learning management system (LMS) that allows companies to build work paths, integrate with a variety of course catalogues and serve employees with the right content at the right time. However, it has also become the first LMS solution to enable companies to build learning into their workflow logic.

With Absorb Infuse, organisations can customise and configure Absorb code behind their firewall and build it entirely into their task flow to infuse learning right into the applications where workers spend their time. Absorb is also focused on educating the market on how to build a more learning-centric culture that prepares organisations for disruptions in the future of work. At the heart of this is development and training as an enabler of innovation and growth.

"Regardless of who your employee is and what criteria they have, what tasks they're responsible for and what needs you have as a company, you can build our technology into the logic of your workflow system and deliver learning into the flow of work," says Mr Owens. "Your employees are your best asset, so it's crucial we educate the C-suite on why learning is so central to a company's productivity and competitiveness."

"From a thought-leadership level, we're providing the counsel and from a technology perspective we have solutions that fully integrate content into the workforce, providing them with any topic they would need and in-the-flow learning configurations."

For more information please visit [AbsorbLMS.com](https://AbsorbLMS.com)



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**Absorb Software provides a learning platform that empowers organisations to embrace learning and promote it in their environment**

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

# Proving the value and return of workplace L&D

Making a business case for investment in learning and development requires a new way of thinking

Cath Everett

The global workplace education market may now be worth a vast \$240 billion, but finding effective ways to measure the return on investment (ROI) of learning and development (L&D) is not proving easy for many organisations.

The sector grew by 7 per cent last year, according to industry analyst Josh Bersin, with such outlay equating to about \$1,200 per employee a year.

Budgets are fairly evenly split between nurturing soft, behavioural skills, such as leadership, and

technical expertise, such as digital, says Octavius Black, co-founder and chief executive of organisational change consultancy Mind Gym, although attention is starting to shift increasingly towards the former.

"It's a large market growing at a decent pace because employers are now recognising the value of improving the effectiveness of their staff," Mr Black explains. "Recruitment has a mixed track record success-wise and so organisations are trying to make the most of what they have."

But change is also starting to take place in how L&D is delivered, among early adopters at least. While content-dumping via classroom or online training has until now been the most common approach to learning, the problem is that unless information is reinforced, the Ebbinghaus forgetting curve – the decline of memory retention over time – indicates it is lost in a matter of days.

Indeed, research by cognitive scientist Art Kohn found that humans forget on average 50 per cent of any new information within an hour, rising to 70 per cent within 24 hours and 90 per cent after a week.

As for trying to evaluate the effectiveness of learning, no matter what its type, it seems there are challenges there too. The Professionalising L&D report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and market researchers Towards Maturity reveals that a mere 36 per cent of practitioners are assessing specific metrics.

Moreover, while 96 per cent profess a keenness for developing a better understanding of the impact of their activities, only 22 per cent are actively trying to improve the way they gather and analyse such data.

But Nick Shackleton-Jones, director of learning and performance innovation at management consultancy PA Consulting, believes until the approach of L&D functions change, it will be unable to demonstrate an ROI because "there isn't one".

"The overall picture is that it's costing a lot of money to take people off the job, but it's not having an impact. In other words, you're not going to get an ROI for L&D using existing approaches," he says.

Instead what is required is a "shift in mindset from structural towards user-centred design", he argues.

"So the focus changes from 'Have you learnt this information and how do you rate it?' to 'What is your job and how will this help you perform more effectively?'" says Mr Shackleton-Jones. "Taking this tack helps to solve the ROI problem because you're solving the business problem."

Possible approaches include measuring an individual's performance and the impact on it over time of a particular intervention, which includes running pilot projects based on control groups. Another option is to introduce project-based learning initiatives based on specific business cases that are linked to certain outcomes.

Whatever the method employed though, Chris Jones, chief executive of vocational skills development organisation City & Guilds Group, agrees that being able to measure impact is becoming increasingly significant. In his view, this is actually more important than calculating L&D's ROI.

"ROI is driven by financial directors asking to see the bottom-line benefits for every pound spent, but it's arguably just one limited measure," he says. "Evaluating the impact of investing in people, however, looks at how things have improved in terms of proficiency levels or staff retention, so it's a more strategic set of questions relating to business performance."

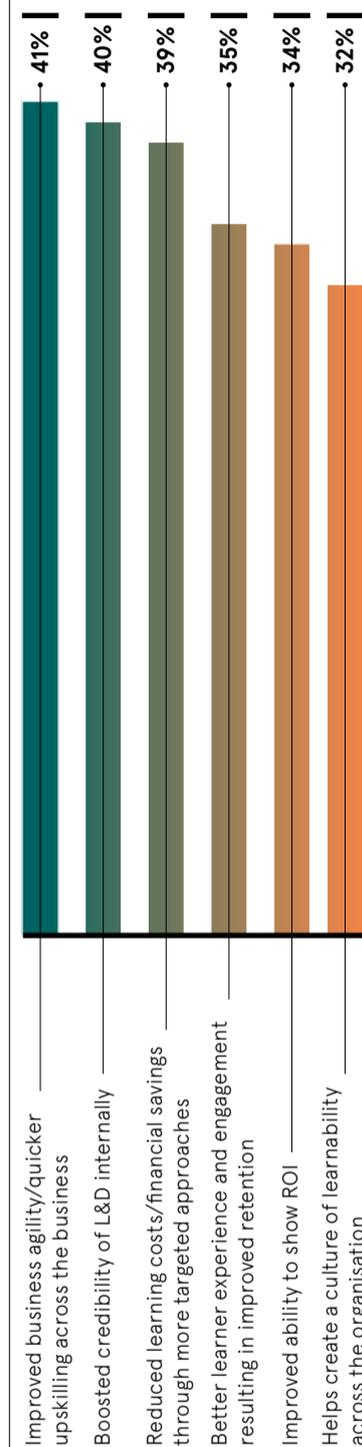
The starting point for L&D professionals in this context is to evaluate where the business is now, where it needs to be in the future and what problems need to be solved to get there. Once desired outcomes have been established, the next step is to come up with appropriate measures to understand whether the intervention led to them being met or not.

But the effective use of both human resources (HR) and operational data can also play a useful role by enabling L&D professionals to identify business problems and link tangible outcomes to expenditure.

Pat Ashworth, director of learning solutions at HR consultancy AdviserPlus, says: "Information on attrition, attendance and performance issues can all help to identify challenges around line-management activities. Once you have this data, you can pinpoint the areas of development needed to enhance managers' skills."

## BENEFITS OF DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING

Percentage of L&D professionals and business leaders who see the following as a benefit



Capita 2019

**“L&D has huge potential to really make an impact on people’s performance, but in many instances, it will require new ways of thinking”**



Django/Getty Images

The effectiveness of this development activity can then be assessed using indicators, such as employee engagement or a reduction in churn rates, to measure success.

But such data is also usually much more convincing to senior executives when trying to make a business case for investment or articulating the benefits of upskilling employees than simply providing them with anecdotal evidence.

As Mr Shackleton-Jones concludes: "It's about being able to show a clear picture of what the future will look like, for example, by saying 'This is currently Bob's experience when he joins the organisation, but in future, it will be that'. L&D has huge potential to really make an impact on people's performance, but in many instances, it will require new ways of thinking." ●

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