

The Future of Learning & Development

Trends, Topics & Tools to Stay Ahead of the Curve

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Executive Summary

How are the world's leading organizations developing their people and honing employees' skills? What is the role of the Learning & Development function today and how will that change in the future?

futurethink asked today's leading thinkers in the area of Learning & Development to share perspectives on where things stand today — and where they are going in the future. The findings may surprise you.

To garner insights, we designed a 30-question survey and reached out to professionals at some of the most innovative firms. In this white paper, we have organized the survey findings to help you see the trends through two lenses: TODAY and TOMORROW. This approach will allow you to measure your own organization against the appropriate benchmarks. How do your efforts rank in comparison to the leaders in the industry?

Highlights of the study:

- **74%** see the influence of L&D expanding in the immediate future (0-2 years)
- **Almost 50%** believe their training offerings will grow in the next two years
- **Online learning is set to take center stage**, with eLearning (62% will offer it), collaborative training (62%) and webinars (55%) being the formats identified as necessary for success
- **85%** agreed/strongly agreed that the majority of learning will be collaborative going forward
- **100%** agreed/strongly agreed that learning in the future will be done in short timeframes, using 'micro modules' to provide more focused learning and achieve better results

What must change if L&D is to be successful?

While Learning & Development professionals face a wide range of issues, some of the most prominent challenges are around the practice of training itself. The big "AHA!" many are realizing is this: the reason training offerings aren't more successful isn't because of the people that attend them (or don't attend them) — it's because of the courses themselves. If L&D teams want better attendance and better ROI for their training offerings, survey respondents voiced that course offerings and presentation need to change dramatically.

▪ Stop offering boring courses

Despite the ability — and technology — to do otherwise, most courses offered today are too long, too boring, and 'too PowerPoint'. Several respondents commented that we need to "stop blaming people for not coming to training, and start improving the courses!". Courses offered today are often dull and not compelling enough for people to sit through even a half-day of training. If L&D specialists want better attendance and more ROI from training initiatives, many voiced that they need to take a look at how well the courses are delivered and if they are up to speed with current learner expectations.

▪ Start focusing on timely topics

If L&D groups want to truly get a seat at the executive table, there is a strong feeling that they will have to do a better job of being true business partners, offering courses that teach the topics that help management *drive business*, not just build foundational skills. While courses on 'team-building' and 'difficult conversations' are important, survey respondents commented that they are working to offer more courses about current issues like social networking, open collaboration, and competitive trends.



▪ **Embrace flexible, blended learning**

Most organizations use in-classroom workshops as the primary means of learning. But in a time where budgets are tight and teams are geographically dispersed, this just isn't reasonable anymore. Managers need training alternatives that let people learn on their own time, or in the ways they learn best. Flexibility in training is key.

▪ **Get to the point**

Why are training courses so...long? Many respondents commented that the vendors they use could deliver the same course, more effectively, in a lot less time if they tried. Good course design needs to be pushed to the next level to better respect participants' time — and better leverage their brainpower. Gone are the days when people could sit in a classroom without multiple interruptions or the fear of political backlash. Stress levels and attention spans being what they are today (short), “micro-courses” are seen as the wave of the future.

▪ **Collaborative and experiential approaches a must**

To really embrace learning, respondents readily admitted that courses needed to let the participants do more *participating*. Most courses today were described as: presentation-heavy, ‘death by PowerPoint’, or too individually focused. When describing their strongest courses, however, words/phrases used included: engaging, experiential, team-exercise driven, and balanced (teaching vs. application of content.) Note: being engaging and experiential did NOT mean that technology was required or had to be used in place of in-person learning. In fact, some of the best courses mentioned were leader led, but done in a way that was more interactive in the overall delivery.

▪ **The need for inspiration**

Learning and Development professionals share a common goal: to help people reach their potential. To truly be successful, L&D leaders need to motivate and inspire people to learn, grow, and take on new challenges. This needs to happen not just through the courses they offer, but with the people that teach them. This needs to happen in the programs they create and at the conferences they attend. Injecting a sense of passion for what they do and what they teach is something that many voiced as a call to action that must happen in the near-term in order to make learning exciting again.

“We’re changing the model before we figure out what’s GOOD. Technology is needed but it isn’t the magic elixir — we must figure out what works first, and apply the right technology second. The key is to figure out the framework around what makes the experience right — and then figure out the technology and delivery solution (online or classroom). Better courses are a must.”

—Jim Trunick, Senior Director, Corporate Training and Development, Allergan

How do these insights compare with your own thinking? Do these findings align with your organization’s learning and development plans for the next few years?

Read on to find out more about what we learned from the survey and how you can use the results to guide your company’s learning and development strategies.



How This Survey Was Conducted

During the months of July and August, 2009, we asked leaders from a wide variety of industries to give us their point of view on Learning & Development — where it stands today and where it's headed for tomorrow. Respondents provided insights and thoughtful recommendations regarding how companies can make training efforts more effective in the years to come.

Using an online questionnaire, which included multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended questions, we were able to gain a high-level strategic view of the most important trends and issues in learning and development.

Our respondents represented all levels of managers at both small and large companies across a broad range of industries:

Breakdown by Industry

Technology	16%
Consumer Packaged Goods	14%
Healthcare	14%
Retail	14%
Financial Services	11%
Education	8%
Services (other)	8%
Industrial Products	6%
Government	3%
Media & Entertainment	3%
Non-Profit	3%
Automotive	0%
Total	100%

Position in Organization

Director	28%
Vice President	19%
Manager	17%
Chief Learning Officer	14%
Associate	8%
Other, please specify	8%
President / CEO	6%
Total	100%

Size of Organization

fewer than 5,000 employees	19%
5,001-10,000 employees	14%
10,001-50,000 employees	25%
50,001-100,000 employees	3%
Over 100,000 employees	39%
Total	100%



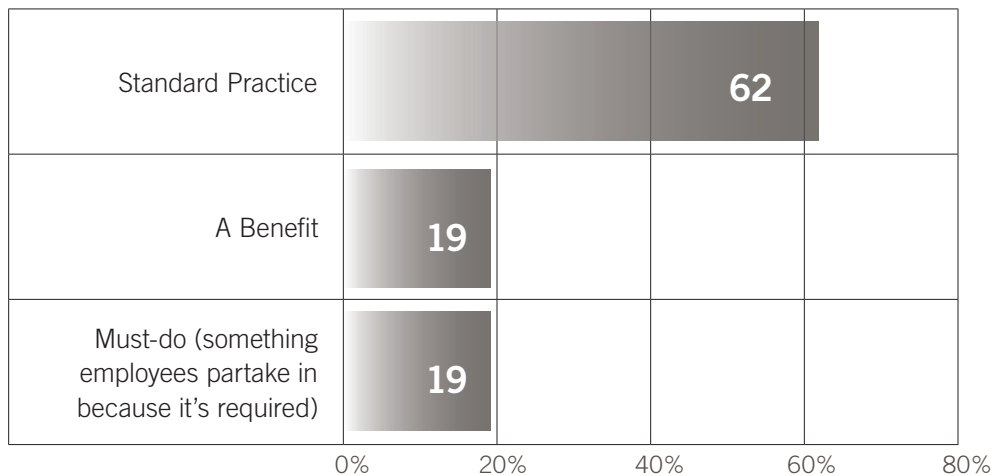
Key Findings: The Changing Role of Learning & Development

Survey respondents clearly agree that the Learning & Development function is on the brink of tremendous change. Leaders expect to see major changes in the role of Learning & Development, how its services are delivered, and how the function is perceived within the organization.

PART I: TODAY

A picture of the Learning & Development function looks something like this today:

Learning & Development as a function is viewed by employees within our company as:



Standard Practice:

“People **expect** that there will be training offerings, skill building courses, and people development of some kind. It’s seen as ‘status quo’ by many in the organization.”

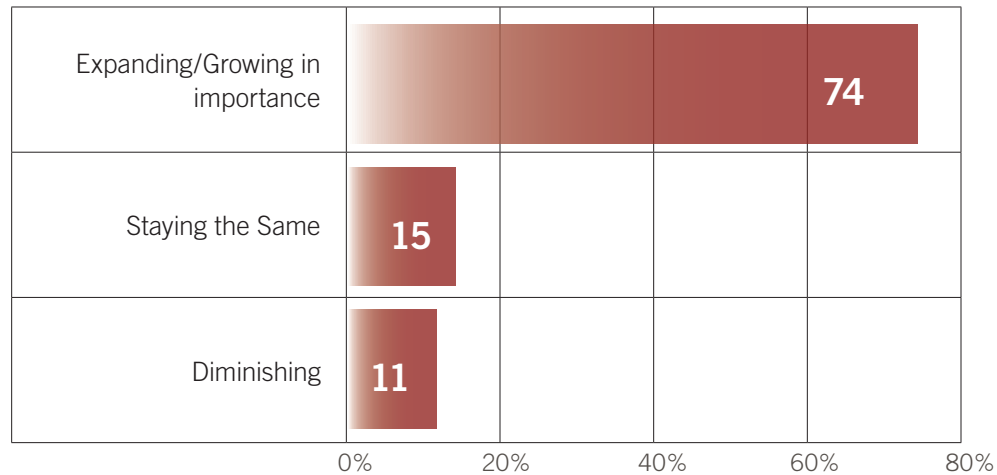
Benefit:

“The reason many people come to work at our company is because we invest in our people, and we do it in a way that doesn’t just build our business but it helps them grow personally.”



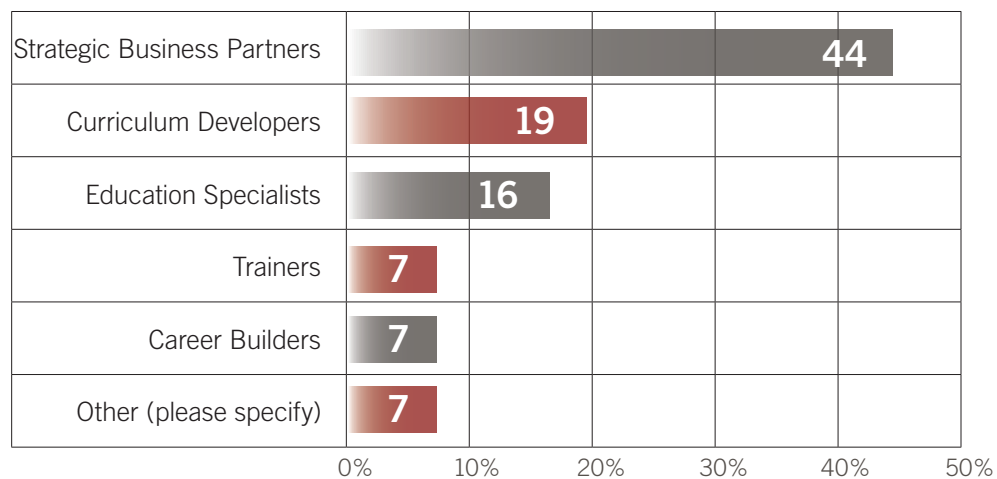
The predominant view of L&D being ‘standard practice’ is changing. A full 74% of respondents see the influence of L&D expanding in the coming years. As a function, L&D will not just be “offering courses” and “managing development as best we can” but instead will play a greater role in generating value for the company:

At my company, the influence that the Learning & Development team has on creating value in the company is:



In fact, the role of the L&D team is starting to be widely viewed as that of a strategic business partner. This represents a major change: many respondents noted a shift from being perceived as ‘pure trainers’ or ‘curriculum developers’ to ‘a group that business leaders increasingly rely upon’ to shape the leaders of tomorrow.’

The role of Learning & Development in my organization can best be described as:



As a result of this shift, training and developing talent is seen as a more crucial responsibility. Courses are offered across a range of key audiences to ensure that the right skills and content offerings are mapped to the correct population.

High potentials were viewed as the group with a growing training priority within companies. There was also a heavy emphasis on offering training for managers and those leading teams and business units.

	Importance/Rank
High Potentials	1
Managers	2
New Employees	3
Executives	4
General Employee Population	4

Prioritizing Training Audiences

But how do you determine which audiences to train? Certainly audience segmentation within training efforts has increased over the years. As a result, the mapping of a curriculum to skills has become more complex. With so many groups or levels requiring a more specialized curriculum (in an ideal world), successful audience segmentation often requires significant resources and dollars.

Unfortunately, today's L&D leaders are not working with unlimited budgets and have therefore been forced to make tough decisions regarding segmentation. Our respondents shared how they prioritize audiences for training:

1. Determined by Financial and Growth Results, Strategic Planning

"Audience priorities for training are determined by Key Result Areas — defined each fiscal year in the areas of Finance, New Growth Initiatives, Quality Indicators, Patient Satisfaction/Service. High Potentials are always targeted as a key audience."

"Allocation is based on demands of the marketplace."

"[As part of the] strategic planning process."



2. Determined by Job Bands/Existing Tiered Curriculum

“Leadership programs drive our training buckets — executives have a multi-tier set that they attend as they are promoted.”

“Job banding.”

3. Determined by Business Unit Heads/Assessment Needs

“Our talent review process differentiates the investment we make by title, performance level and function.”

“Based on largest need — we ask ourselves ‘where are the gaps? What groups need to do things differently?’”

“Talking with managers in businesses to understand needs and challenges.”

“Leadership potential assessments and conversations.”

4. Open Enrollment — Previous Course Interest Levels

“It has been more of an open enrollment approach. However, we are evolving to a more custom solution for particular teams as well as in the process of identifying High Potentials and successors which will be key in planning future programs.”

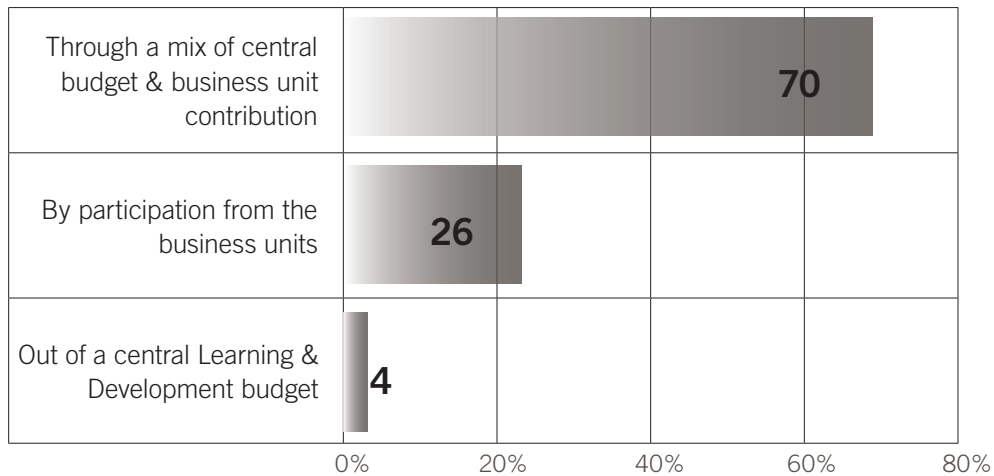


Funding for L&D Programs

Despite a tough financial climate, respondents were still investing in many forms of training. However, funding for training efforts remains tricky. Most respondents indicated significant challenges related to the mechanics of funding efforts overall.

Many L&D specialists commented that if they had more control over budgets, they could develop stronger curricula. The majority of funding for learning and development comes from a mix of central budget and business unit contribution:

We currently fund our Learning & Development efforts:



Course Offerings

In general, the categories of courses offered today are still fairly consistent with the offerings of a decade ago. However, many voiced enthusiasm that this must — and will — change in the near future.

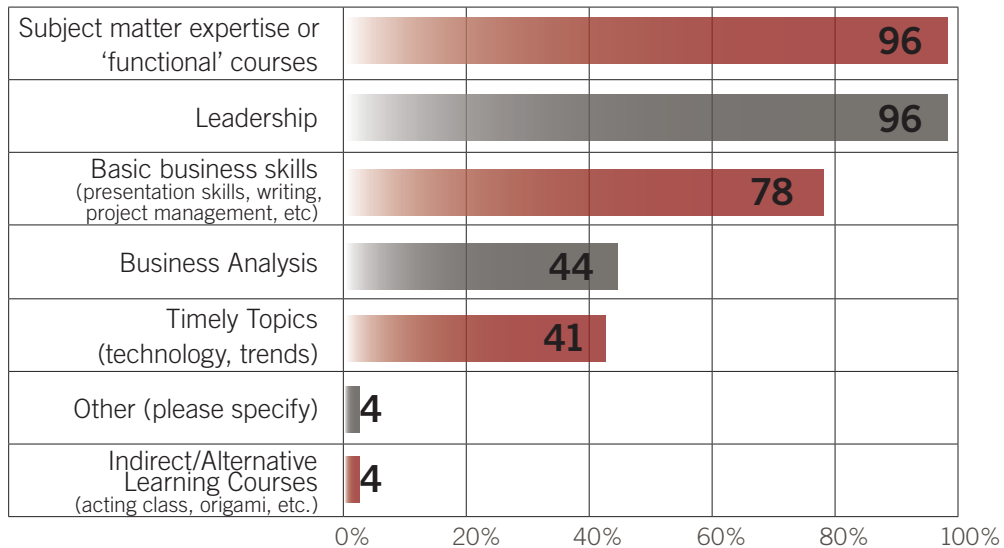
Today:

“We have to offer business basics, subject matter expertise and leadership offerings. It’s non-negotiable.”

Tomorrow:

“There is a strong need to provide learning on timely topics. The world is changing so fast that for my L&D group to be seen as a true strategic player in this organization, we need to provide timely insights, not just basic skill courses.”

Our current curriculum offers courses covering the following topics: (select all that apply)

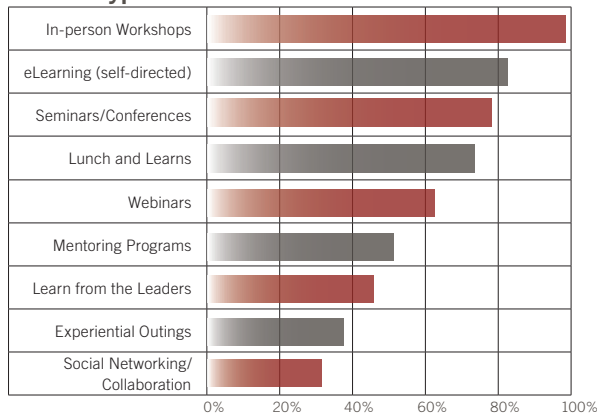


Course Delivery

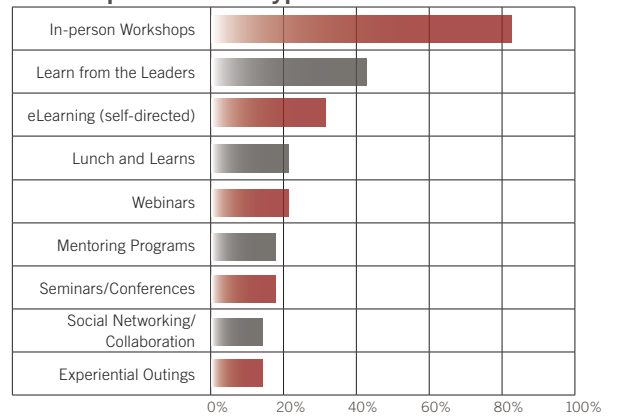
Respondents confirmed that course delivery today still includes the mix of usual suspects (in-person workshops, eLearning, webinars, conferences, lunch ‘n learns). However, it’s interesting to look at the gap between what’s *offered* and what’s *popular*. Workshops remain the favored forum for learning, while Learn from Leaders and eLearning follow closely behind.

The survey highlighted a sharp decline in seminar and conference participation (“it’s far less popular now for obvious reasons...”). Many commented that this option is not viable — or even politically correct — due to the current financial environment.

Course Types Offered



Most Popular Course Types



Ranking by Course Delivery	What's Offered	Vs. Popular
In-person Workshops	1	1
eLearning (self-directed)	2	3
Seminars/Conferences	3	7
Lunch and Learns	4	4
Webinars	5	5
Mentoring Programs	6	6
Learn from the Leaders	7	2
Experiential Outings	8	9
Social Networking/Collaboration	9	8



Measuring L&D Effectiveness

Ultimately, demonstrating success for the L&D function comes down to measurement. Learning & Development must deliver results to get funding and justify its presence in the organization as a strategic need and not a 'nice to have.'

But how do the L&D leaders do this? Open responses pointed to a variety of methods — ranging from Profits per FTE and Return on Capital Expenditures, to 'hit and miss' or 'we don't measure.'

Surveys/Evaluations

- "Employee engagement survey data."
- "Level 3 survey, informal discussions."
- "Through formal evaluations, somewhat through performance metrics, and critical stakeholder feedback."
- "Post-learning event online evaluations."
- "Retention and engagement surveys."

Financial/Business Results

- "Profits per FTE."
- "Through business results."
- "Return on capital expenditures."
- "By results — financial and retention."

Lack of Measurement

- "Hit and miss."
- "We are currently developing this."
- "We do not do a good job of this at all."
- "Not measured."

General L&D metrics

- "Retention."
- "Still based on how learners apply the learning."
- "Number of enrollments."
- "Participation, engagement in functional areas."
- "Mostly anecdotally... highlighting how L&D experiences helped individuals achieve a goal, solve a problem, or meet a business need."
- "Feedback, how practical content is to bring back to the workplace, performance/results."
- "We measure impact of learning on an employee engagement level. Lots more work to do here."
- "Number of employees trained, retention of those sent to top courses, placement of high potentials based on competencies built through training and on the job practice."

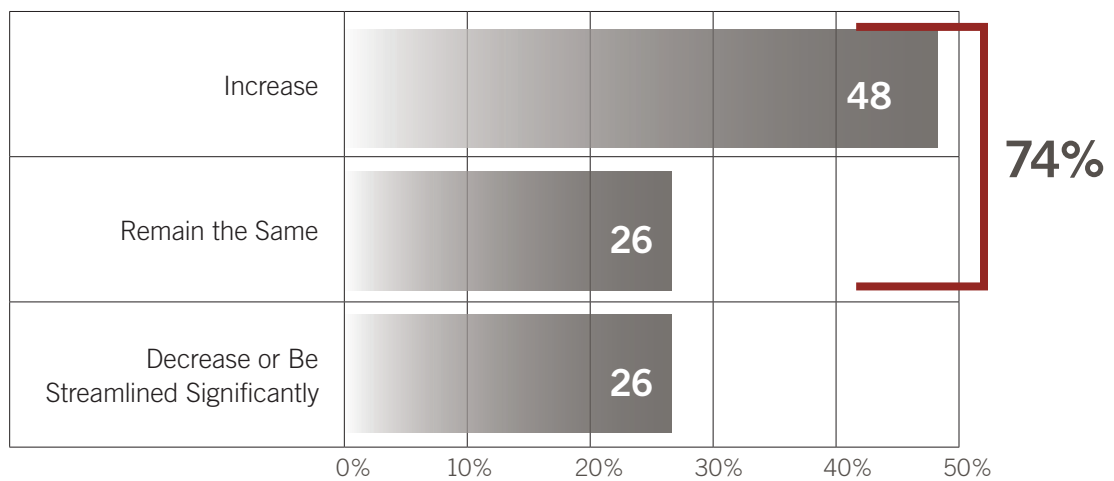


PART II: TOMORROW

So what does this mean? Where do we go from here?

The outlook, it seems, is quite positive — and quite progressive. While many are feeling the pinch now, respondents feel their role — and their offerings — will only grow in the future. Again, 74% believed that the influence their group has on creating true value is growing in importance. In addition, 74% believed they would maintain or increase their current level of training offerings over the next two years:

In the next two years, my number of training offerings will:



“L&D professionals are challenging historical assumptions about how to manage the significant investment that training represents for a company — assumptions about the products themselves, and even more, assumptions about the operations of this function. The question isn’t growing vs. not growing — it’s about **how** we grow.”

— Pratiksha Patel, *Learning for Development*, L’oréal North America



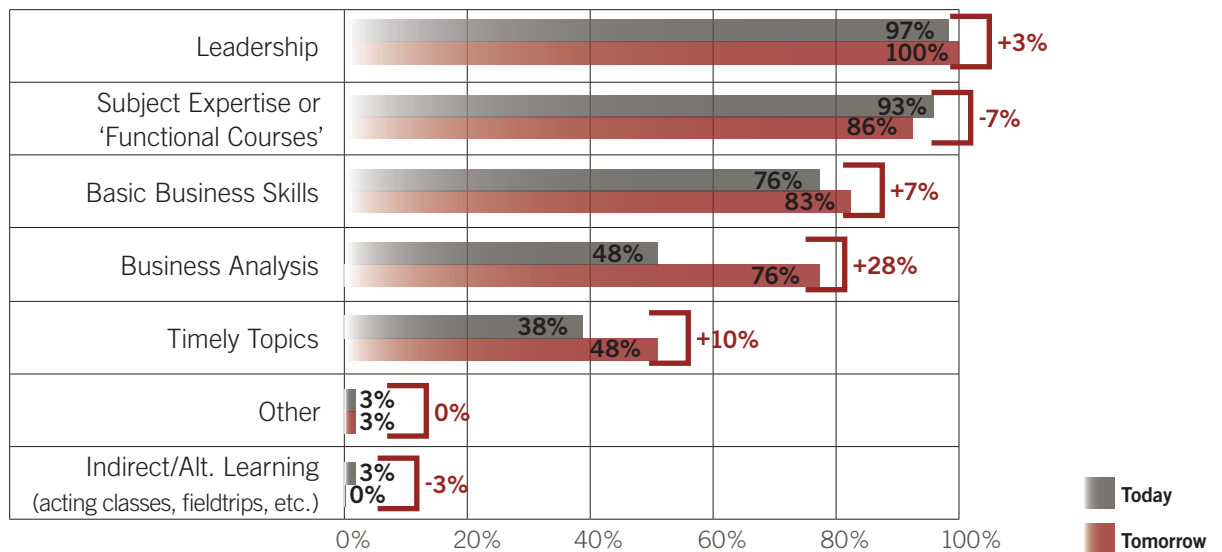
Tomorrow's Course Offerings

One of the most interesting findings from the survey is regarding the types of courses planned for the future. Today, the courses on leadership skills, subject matter expertise, and business basics (writing, presentation skills) command the top spots. However, L&D groups are being asked by business unit leaders to provide courses on more strategic and timely issues.

No longer can L&D be the group that gives employees 101 courseware on common business topics. Business unit leaders now require their teams to stay on top of competitive trends and analyze complex business situations. As a result, L&D groups are being asked to rise to the challenge and address these issues via compelling courseware.

In fact, the biggest shifts in terms of offerings will be in the areas of Timely Topics (being digitally fluent, understanding global markets) and, Business Analysis (competitive information gathering, staying on top of larger trends).

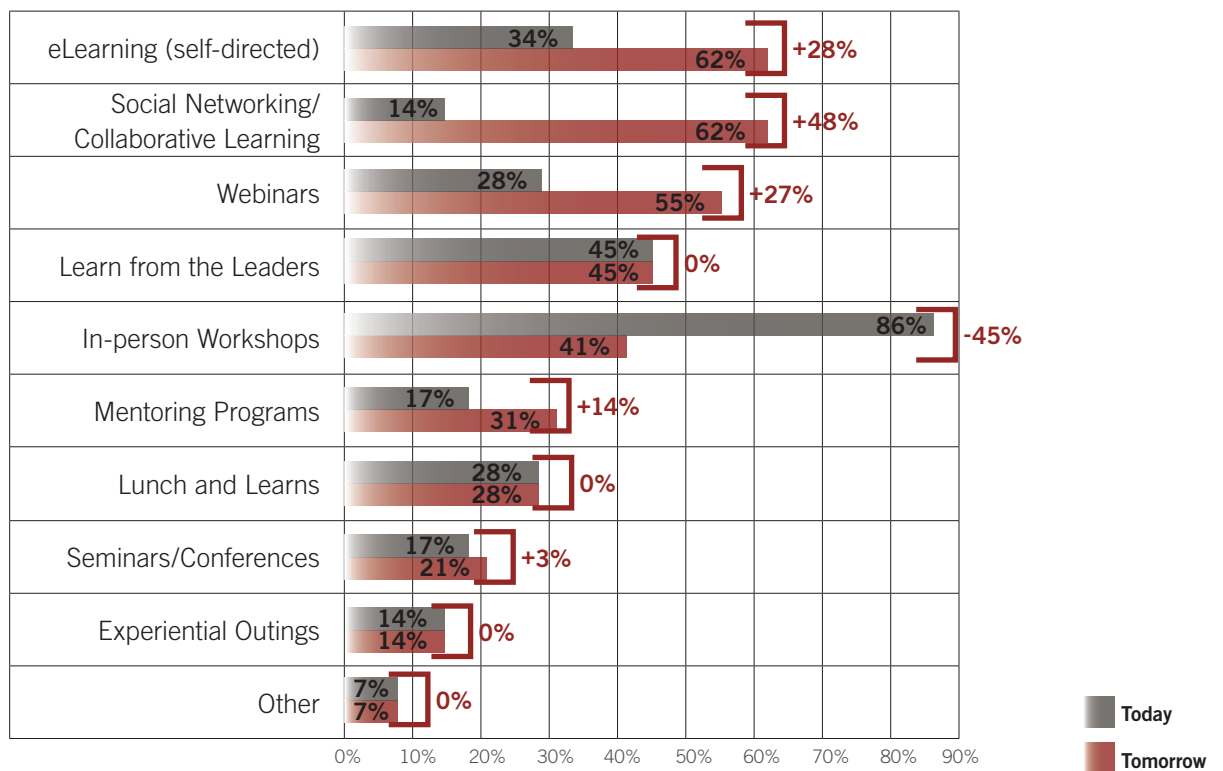
Course Topics



Tomorrow's Delivery Formats

Perhaps more important than *what* courses will be delivered is *how* they will be delivered. While in-person workshops remain the most common — and most popular — form of training, there is change on the horizon. When asked the question: “What will be the most popular form of learning in your organization in the next two years?”, the popularity of “In-classroom workshops” fell a full 45%, with the balance shifting in favor of more digital and collaborative learning including: Social media/collaborative learning (+48%), eLearning (+28%) and webinars (27%).

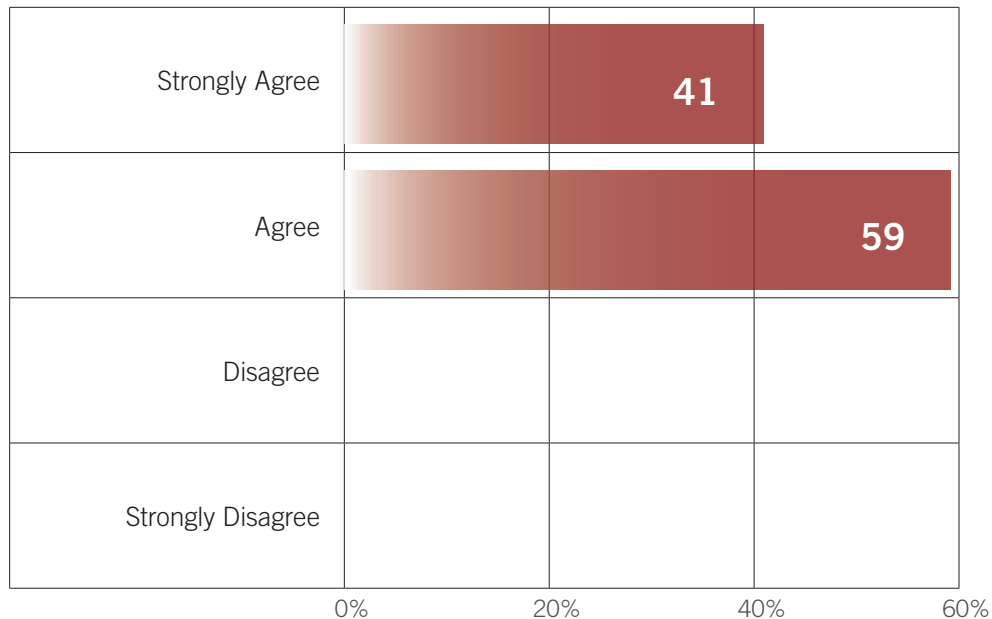
Course Delivery Formats



We identified some common causes behind this shift:

- **Education Across Generations:** “We have four generations at work, so we need to take a blended learning approach — one size doesn’t fit all anymore. Older groups still prefer the facilitated classroom sessions, while younger groups prefer online learning. However, the one thing that transcends all groups is that they are strapped for time and resources — so learning delivered in more focused, shorter bursts is key, and making these modules available in online (webinars) or self-paced formats (eLearning) is a must.”
- **Need for Collaboration and Interactivity:** “I can see a significant increase in the use of online learning in the future. People need it because they can’t afford (time or money) to travel to attend a course or seminar. However, eLearning has a long way to go — it needs to be more engaging and crisp for people to adopt it. Presentations have to almost involve actors vs. talking heads to keep people engaged in a virtual atmosphere. People need to interact with the material more because there isn’t anyone there to facilitate the learning.”
- **Increased Focus on Productivity:** “The issue isn’t just about how the content is delivered online versus in the classroom — it’s about time. No one has 2-3 days anymore to be away from their desk in a training session, unfortunately. They need micro-learning — bursts of focused courses that teach them just what they want, when they want it. It’s like getting the Cliff Notes version of a course in terms of its length, but with the richness and key points of the entire workshop.”

...In the future, the majority of learning will be in shorter timeframes, such as ‘micro modules’ or ‘micro learning’

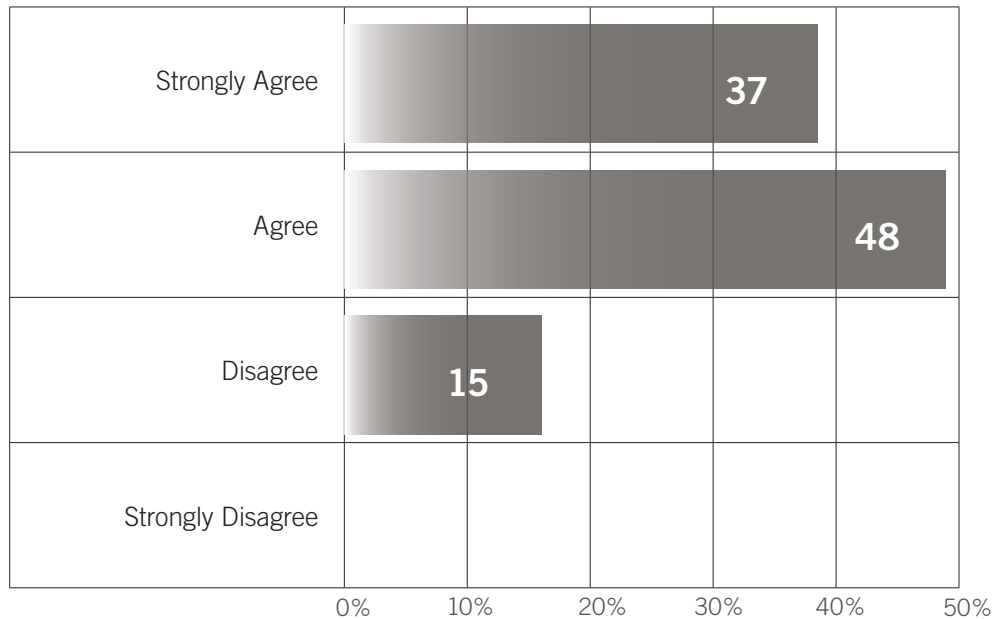


A Shift Towards Collaborative Learning

Most importantly, 85% of respondents believe that future learning will be much more collaborative. With the presence of social networking, email and rapid communication in our personal lives, people expect their training to be collaborative as well.

This means more facilitated webinars, more exploration with social networking, and increased usage of dynamic eLearning with simulation and interactivity. In-classroom courses will need to focus less on the ‘preach and teach’ format, and more on the experiential, interactive exercise format of learning.

...the majority of learning will be collaborative



“Learning is about engagement. Talent + Engagement = Strength.”

— Jim Trunick, Senior Director, Corporate Training and Development, Allergan



What Skills Will Matter in the Future?

Overwhelmingly, respondents voiced the need for stronger communication skills (in all mediums), collaboration, flexibility and agility. The future seems to be increasingly complicated, and employees will need to manage, communicate and anticipate this continual sense of change very well.

“Employees in the future will need a strong sense of inquiry and collaboration. As technology plays an increasingly important part of their lives, they have to know how to use this to stay connected with people — not just data — to be successful.”

“Excellent communication and collaboration skills are a must — online and off. It’s time we went beyond writing skills and email skills to teach employees creative ways to collaborate, share and drive change.”

New Attitudes Toward Attendance

Attendance is always an issue for training. Employees today are pulled in many directions, which results in frequent training cancellations — often at the last minute. While intentions are generally good, employees have, as one respondent put it, “an issue with commitment!”

But what’s the solution? Many believe they need to build a better program:

“We keep viewing poor attendance as an employee problem. I can’t help but wonder if it’s a course problem. If we want people to commit to training, we need to give them a reason to tear away from their desk. Presenters that drone on in front of PowerPoint aren’t the answer.”

“Better courses = more attendees. I’m constantly looking for more dynamic, interactive, inspiring people that make people realize learning can be fun AND productive. That’s what makes people come to training.”

“Ensure the courses are well designed (careful analysis and design), useful and compelling.”

“Build a better program so that they want to come.”



Words of Wisdom

At the end of our survey, we asked respondents for their final thoughts and advice on the future. Through this and a series of follow-up phone interviews, top Learning & Development professionals offered these words of wisdom:

What's the one piece of advice you would give a L&D colleague?

THEME: Be a business partner and expert, not just a training expert

“Stay close to the business and ask the business partners what they lack, and what they really need.”

“Collaborate upfront with business partners and align goals — it's the only way you'll get traction.”

“Be a business or functional expert first, and an L&D professional second. Have the credibility in your business as someone who is able to help leaders and teams identify and understand the strategic needs they need for success.”

How can L&D leaders best advocate the importance of continual talent development in the next few years?

THEMES: Understand the business and offer better courses

“We must stop the mind-numbingly boring and/or outrageously expensive programs that are run today. By better understanding the business so that they don't need to try to sell “continual talent development” to management, we can instead sell results to the business in the form of a fully capable employees.”

“L&D really needs to understand the business imperatives — what are the business issues, where are the talent gaps, how do we fill those gaps? It's not about traditional training anymore. It's getting the right people in the right roles with the right skills.”

Success for L&D professionals in the future largely depends on...

THEMES: Vision, engagement, measurement

“Linking personal values to organizational values and set clear goals.”

“Development of senior leadership support, strategic vision, and a clarification of process to achieve long-range corporate goals.”

“Having the ambition and insight to meet stated needs with flawless execution, speed to market and “measurable” value, and to meet unstated needs through careful planting and cultivating to prepare for whatever the future holds.”



What's Next?

How can you embrace the future of Learning & Development in your own organization?

Leveraging the learnings from the survey, we've compiled a Future of L&D checklist to use with yourself or your team. Use these questions as a way to drive strategic planning efforts, or as a thought starter in your next staff meeting:

1 Vision: In your organization, what role do you see the Learning & Development team playing in the future? How is that different from its role today?

2 Skills: What does the employee of the future look like in your organization? What skills will you have to teach to arm employees for success?

3 Training Audience: What are the top three audiences you'll train in the future? How is this different from today — and why?

4 Course Delivery: What new delivery methods for training can you start to explore right now? Will your approach be more blended in the future? Why/why not?

5 Course Length: What is the average length of your courses? How can you make them more accelerated to meet the demands of today's time-strapped employees?

6 Course Types: What course topics must you add to your curriculum to stay fresh? What courses would the business units/employees need to stay competitive — beyond the basics?

7 Training Participation: What two things could you change right now to improve your training attendance?

8 The Final Question: Imagine that you've been given an unlimited amount of money to create the Learning & Development organization of the future. What three things will you do?



About future**think**

future**think** is a leading innovation research and training firm.

We help organizations enhance their innovation capabilities by arming them with the tools and techniques they need for success. future**think** offers the largest catalog of innovation research and tools in the world, along with the most comprehensive innovation training curriculum anywhere. With over 250 resources and tools, and more than 40 courses focused on critical innovation topics and techniques, we provide organizations with what they need to quickly get results from their innovation efforts.

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The future**think** Innovation Institute is the training hub of future**think**, a leading innovation research and training firm.

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