L&D and Learner Experience

2023 Trends Report

How L&D is elevating human potential in a time of rapid change

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Introduction
FINDING OUR TRUE NORTH IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

> **They always say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.**

—Andy Warhol

When we launched this report last year, we were two years into a global pandemic, heightened periods of social unrest, and highly visible tensions between employers and their people. These catalysts created space for people to rethink their relationship to work like never before.

Workers said: **We're tired of things not changing. And we're tired of change that doesn't meet our needs.**

Last year we heard—from participants in our survey, our clients, and, yes, here at SweetRush—a strong connection between change and suffering.

We saw **agility and adaptability** show up #1 on the list of top skills (where it remains this year), right alongside the challenges of low resilience and burnout.

Well, not to get too meta, but it seems our sentiment toward change is changing.

This year, we're hearing a shift from suffering from the punishing pace of change to *acceptance* **that change is happening.** And we need to make it work: for our businesses, for our people, and for ourselves—in the face of economic uncertainty and extreme time pressure.

> **We must be adaptable to the change that is rapidly taking place. Listening, learning, adapting, and keeping a positive mindset will be very important.**
>
> *—L&D Leader*

> **We are in the midst of huge transformation, so we must be able to adapt to and embrace change, with an eye for creative, sustainable processes that keep us competitive in the future.**
>
> *—L&D Leader*

Yet the shift from suffering to acceptance brings a whole new set of questions.

We see that we're stuck in the old ways of working, but we're uncertain about how to change. We know we need to prepare for the future—but what is the future?

> **Between big concepts like future-proofing the learning programs to emerging software, there's only so many hours in the day to learn new things and recalibrate my way of thinking. I worry about being stuck in the past and paying too much attention to the wrong thing coming in the future.**
>
> *—L&D Leader*

While we know we don't have all the answers or a crystal ball to see what the future of learning in the workplace will be, we're confident in this: **We must put the learner at the center of our craft.**

That's not at the expense of serving the business, which needs L&D *more than ever* to help fulfill its purpose and respond to change driven by customer experience, stakeholder pressures, market conditions, political forces, and climate change. In a world of data, we need to know that what we're doing is working and pivot when it's not.

Yet our work will not be effective if we don't embrace and elevate our focus on our audience. And, as you'll see in our report, this continues to be a primary L&D challenge: **creating learner-centered, personalized, engaging experiences that make change possible.**

In this year's report, we're rolling out a first iteration of our Learner-Centered Design Model. This represents a coalescence of 20 years of SweetRush's work with our clients creating learning experiences that set new standards for engagement. It's a holistic view of learners that is grounded in empathy and a heightened awareness of human needs.

If I can be so bold as to riff on the words of B.B. King (one of my favorite quotes), the beautiful thing about learning—for all of us working in this craft—is that there's so much to learn. And if there's one thing that unites learning professionals, it's our love of learning.

Let's keep learning and changing together.

Danielle Hart, *SweetRush Chief Brand Officer*

SWEETRUSH®
IN SERVICE OF LIFE POTENTIAL™

Great Place To Work® Certified 2023 USA

22 Years In Business
130 Projects Completed In 2022

Located In
12 Countries
250+ Teammates

What Makes Us SweetRush
Culture of Caring
Instructional-Creative-Tech Fusion
Innovation
Breadth & Depth
True, Committed Partners

PEOPLE-CENTERED SERVICES

Custom Learning
Creative, Innovative Solutions That Achieve Business Results

Talent Solutions
Staff Augmentation for L&D

Culture & Leadership
Transformation through Intentional Action

XR
Immersive Tech for L&D

Good Things
Support for Nonprofits and Foundations

CoDesign
L&D Solution Design, Inspired by Design Thinking

SRVO
Diverse Voiceover Narration for eLearning

Trusted by
95 World-Class Organizations

Banking/Finance
Business Services
Consumer Goods
Healthcare
Hospitality

Nonprofit
Pharma
Retail
Technology

20% Of Our Clients

Award Winning

Let's Work Together!
GET IN TOUCH ▸
info@sweetrush.com

Brandon Hall Group Awards 2017–2022
147 Awards, 106 GOLD, 32 Categories
Wins with Bayer, Capgemini, Google, Hilton, SHRM, and many more

Training Industry Top 20
Custom Content Development and Experiential Learning

eLearning Industry, Chosen #1
Best Sales Training Company
Best Virtual Training Company
Most Socially Responsible eLearning Company

Chief Learning Officer, 8 GOLD
Community Service, Content, eLearning, Tech Innovation

SURVEY SAYS:
WHO RESPONDED

Our survey ran from December to February, and we collected **a total of 277 responses.**

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

- 62% — Corporation
- 15% — Nonprofit Foundation
- 12% — Other
- 11% — Self-employed

TYPE OF TEAM

- 65% — L&D In-House
- 19% — Vendor L&D
- 9% — Another In-House Team
- 7% — HR In-House
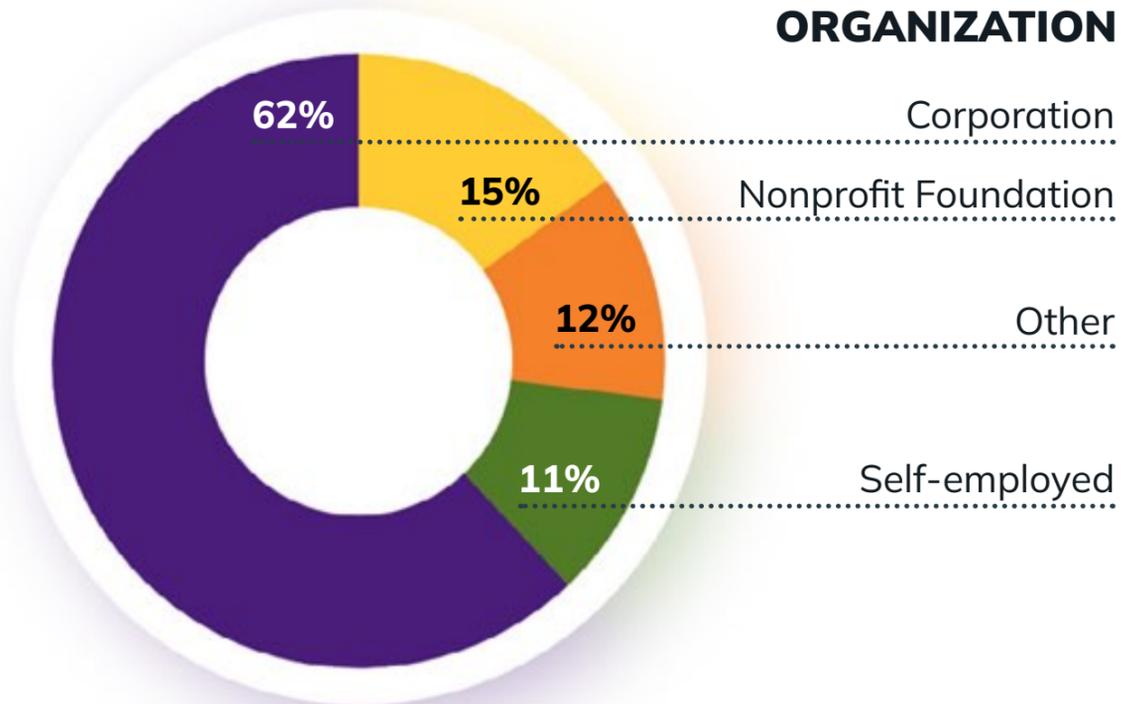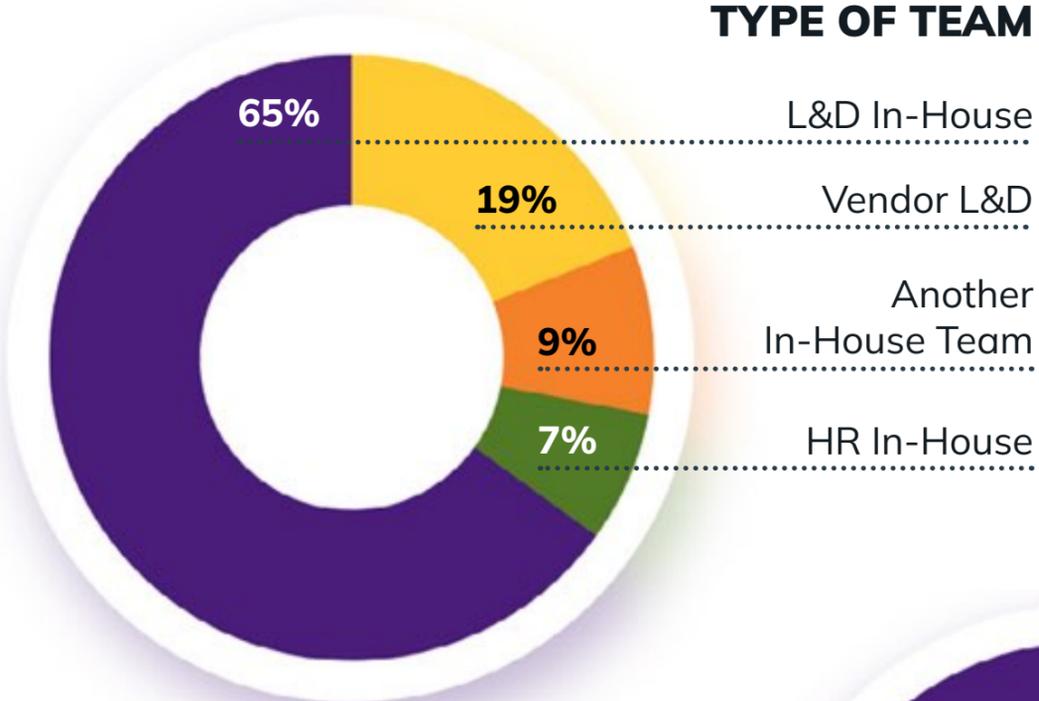
39%
of respondents are L&D corporate leaders

TYPE OF ROLE

- 38% — Individual contributor
- 29% — Manager
- 27% — Director and above
- 6% — Other
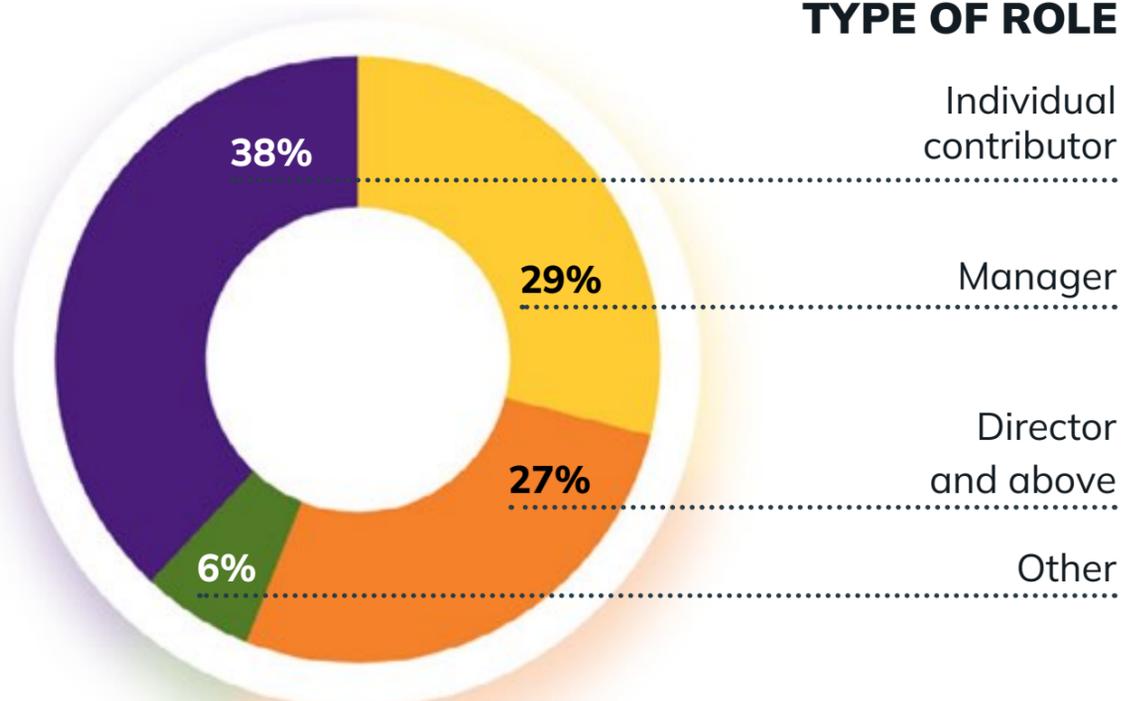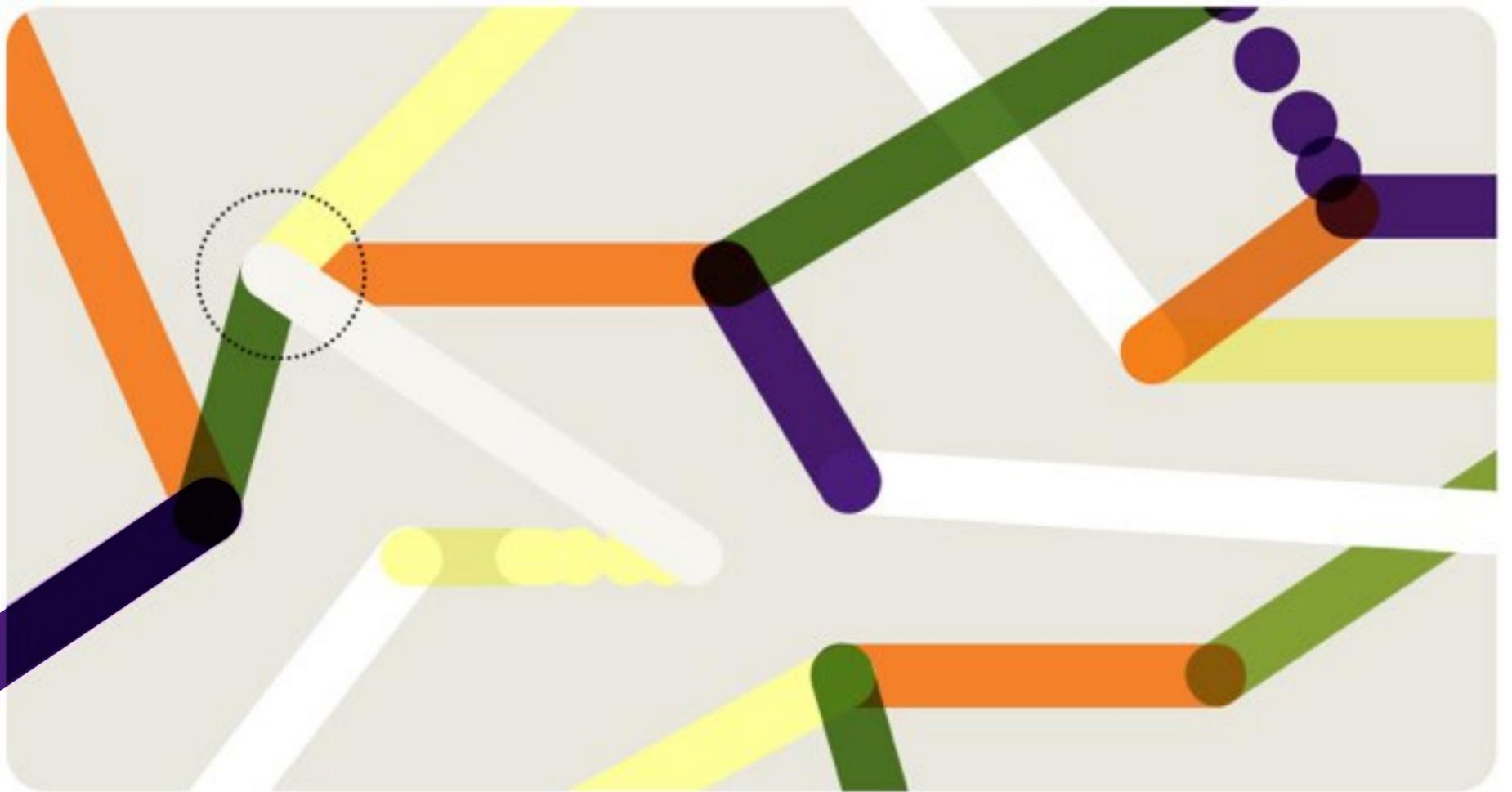
Section 1
SCALE UP AND SUPPORT CHANGE: SKILLS IN DEMAND

Building, scaling, evolving—even amid economic uncertainty, companies are growing. Leaders are responding more quickly to data, following market indicators and opportunities. For L&D, this means more pressure to get our people onboarded, skilled, and productive—fast.

And skills are more than training needs; they're increasingly becoming a cornerstone of how companies engage and support their people, from recruiting to career development. This year's data reflects global workplace trends, from increasingly diverse workforces to hybrid work and inclusive leadership.

> **In an ever-evolving time, the need to upskill or reskill at a moment's notice is in demand at my organization.**
>
> *—L&D Leader*

TOP SKILLS

*We asked survey participants to choose the top 5 skills
in demand at their organization.*

2023 Ranking	Skill	%		2022 Ranking
1	Agility and adaptability	57%	=	1
2	Analytics and reporting	36%	=	2
3	Collaboration	29%	↑	4
4	Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging	27%	↑	7
5	Coaching mindset	26%	↑	9
6	Emotional intelligence, including empathy	25%	new	n/a
7	Leadership	24%	↓	3
8	Strategic thinking	23%	↓	5
9	Critical thinking	22%	↓	8
10	Innovation	22%	↓	6
11	Design Thinking	21%	new	n/a
12	Growth mindset	19%	↓	10
13	Creativity	18%	↓	12
14	Computer/software skills	16%	↓	13
15	Industry or occupation-specific technical skills	14%	↓	11
16	Consulting skills	14%	↑	17
17	Business acumen	12%	↓	14
18	Prioritization and time management	12%	=	18
19	Giving and receiving feedback	10%	↑	21
20	Decision-making	10%	=	20

Transformation fueled by integrated skills

The need to shift quickly in response to changing market, climate, social, and political events—and to understand needs, trends, and impact through data—shows in our survey responses. **Agility and adaptability** held onto the top position in our survey, with **analytics and reporting** once again taking second place.

Next in line, however, are human skills— **collaboration, coaching, EQ, and leadership.** Coursera's *Job Skills of 2023* report indicates "skills that blend digital and human expertise are continuing to gain importance."[1] As companies seek greater efficiency and productivity, they need leaders and contributors with a strong combination of technical, personal, and interpersonal skills.

Organizations with a skills-based approach are

57%

more likely to be agile.

Source: Deloitte Insights[2]

Skills needs reflect changes in the workplace

One of the biggest year-over-year jumps was **diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB)**, moving from #7 to #4. We're seeing increased focus in DEIB training—bringing authentic and relevant skills practice that immerses learners into real-world environments versus simply checking a box. And a recent SHRM panel on DE&I programs highlighted the importance of the "B"— belonging—which helps workers "share a sense of purpose and a willingness to invest 'emotional energy' to benefit the company."[3]

Human skills in focus as hybrid work normalizes

We're now three years into the remote and hybrid work experiment, with well-reported tensions between employers and employees— and efficiency, productivity, flexibility, and well-being at stake.

The slight rise of **collaboration** (from #3 to #4) and introduction of **EQ** (#6) perhaps points to the higher difficulty bar for these skills when employees are not in the same physical work environment. As a highly creative, fully remote company since 2009, our experience is more positive, but we too acknowledge that building these skills takes intentional effort.

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1 https://www.coursera.org/campus/resources/job-skills-2023

2 https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/organi-za-tional-skill-based-hiring.html

3 https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavior-al-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/why-do-dei-programs-fail.aspx

Gallup Poll: Challenges of Hybrid Work

30%
cited **decreased team collaboration**

24%
cited r**educed cross-functional communication and collaboration** as challenges of hybrid work

Source: Gallup[4]

4 https://www.gallup.com/workplace/398135/advantages-challenges-hybrid-work.aspx

Democratization of leadership skills

This year we see a strong rise for **coaching mindset** (from #9 to #5), and **EQ**, **strategic thinking**, and **critical thinking** are all in the top 10. We're seeing a focus on bringing these skills, traditionally thought of as leadership skills, throughout all levels of the organization.

> **In a hybrid workforce where various types of teams —from traditional work teams to cross-functional teams, project teams, and more—are called upon to drive business results, vital leadership behaviors must be demonstrated more broadly and at all levels.**

— *Claude Werder, Vice President and Principal HCM Analyst, Brandon Hall Group[5]*

85%
of organizations surveyed said democratizing leadership development **increases engagement** and **fosters collaboration**

Source: Brandon Hall Group[5]

5 https://trainingmag.com/overcoming-challenges-to-democratizing-leadership-development/

"

I believe that by putting DEI, empathy, sustainability, ethics/integrity, and creativity at the forefront, any leader, team, and organization should be able to continue to meet the ongoing challenges of an ever-evolving industry, economy (industry-specific and global) as well as the demands of ongoing development and innovation.

Without these traits, it has been my experience that leaders, teams, and organizations succumb to micro-managing, unhealthy work/life balance, unsustainable/myopic development, lack of creative innovation, inability to meet global competition, and reduction in employee satisfaction/retention/velocity and eventual loss of revenue/business integrity.

—L&D Manager

INSIGHTS

Effective Skill-Building

SWEETRUSH'S LEARNER-CENTERED DESIGN MODEL

By **SweetRush's Design Vision Group**

SweetRush creates custom learning experiences following a Learner-Centered Design (LCD) approach.

At the foundation of LCD is **empathy** for learners, which we continually seek to deepen through learning analytics, via conversations, usage data, and whatever else we're provided to help us understand them better.

Our design recommendations stem from our understanding of what learners think and feel, what they do, what interests them, where they want to go, obstacles in their way, their learning preferences, and so on.

SWEETRUSH LEARNER-CENTERED DESIGN MODEL

Using the human body as a model, we can explain the key principles of our LCD approach:
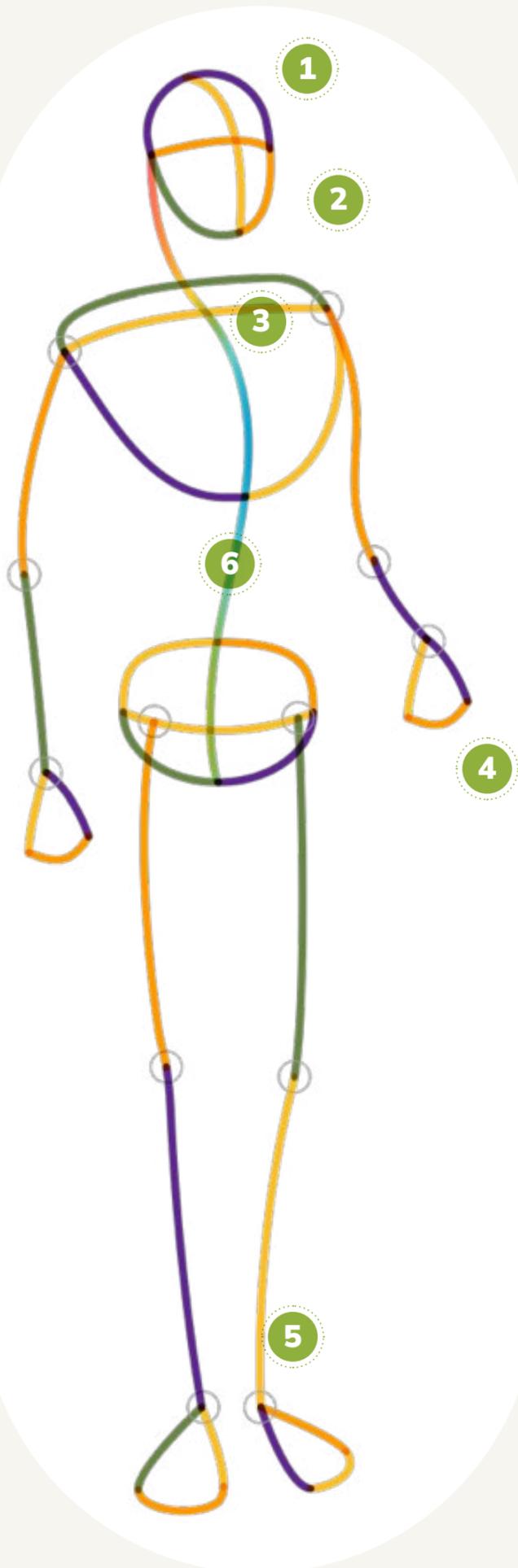
1. The Brain: Learners process information through the lens of their existing knowledge and skills, previous experiences, conditioning, and beliefs. **With LCD, we seek to understand their unique perspectives and create experiences that engage their senses and support mental model shifts.** We use best practices in user experience, aesthetic design, and user engagement to heighten their focus, engage their emotions, and give them control.

2. The Mouth: People gain proficiency by interacting with others (family, friends, teachers, coaches, supervisors, colleagues). Most jobs entail interaction with other people, and some, such as leadership, are almost fully that. **LCD provides social learning opportunities— help, direction, feedback, conversation, and generally, social engagement.**

3. The Heart: People learn only when they want to learn, and they want to learn when it can help themselves, their families and friends, peers and teams, customers, and/or the world. **LCD motivates them via a strong WIIFM and by connecting learning to challenges learners face and aspirations they have for the future.**

4. The Hands: People naturally learn by doing. They call up relevant models, take action, get results, reflect, refine models, and so gain higher levels of competency over time. **LCD provides opportunities to practice authentic tasks with feedback and reflection to achieve the desired outcome: skill development, behavior change, or both.**

5. The Feet: People yearn for new challenges, reduction of suffering, better engagement with the world, greater fulfillment—and they vote with their feet when it's time to move on. Each of us seeks, through the steps we take in our journey, to reach our life's potential, which spurs us to learn and grow. **LCD provides guidance and support, so all learners can make progress on their goals, gain experience, advance in their careers, improve their way of doing and being, and get to better places.**

6. The Core: People are complex—the brain, heart, mouth, hands, and feet interact in infinite ways to enable each to survive and, hopefully, thrive. Think of the body as the learner's unique OS. LCD is an art and science, embracing the entire person and acknowledging the complexity of the whole. **LCD centers on strong adult learning and user engagement principles, then expands to a holistic approach that leads to creative, innovative methods that bring rich and novel experiences to our learners.**

SWEETRUSH LEARNER-CENTERED DESIGN MODEL

LEARNER-CENTERED DESIGN: WHERE DO WE STAND?

We asked participants: Which of these most closely describes your organization's approach to learning design?

Level 1: Training is generally one-size-fits-all; no opportunity to integrate input from learners into the training design and delivery; learning is mainly formal and prescribed (ILT/vILT and/or eLearning); learning technology limited to LMS — **35.8%**

Level 2: Learners have some choice in what they consume; some input from learners on design and delivery; mostly formal learning with some informal (coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning); learning tech includes LXP/other tools to augment formal learning — **26.0%**

Level 3: Learning is an ongoing part of an employee's experience, many resources available; learners have a voice in design and delivery; mix of formal and informal learning; some use of adaptive learning; variety of technologies to help learners gain mastery — **17.7%**

Level 4: Learning is continuous, flexible, and adaptive to individuals' needs and interests; learners' voice is essential in design; they have control over what and how they learn; learning culture encourages informal learning; career dev part of L&D strategy — **20.4%**

INSIGHTS

WHAT DOES LEARNER-CENTERED SKILL-BUILDING LOOK LIKE?

By **Clare Dygert,** Director of Learning Experience Design

Often the request for performance-based learning programs comes from business leaders who see a gap between what the team can do and what they need to do in order for the business to succeed. Can skills training developed in response to business needs also be learner-centered? Not only is the answer a strong "yes," but it is also "it must be"—if you want the learning to be effective and make a positive impact.

So, what makes for great skills-based learning?

- The focus is on tasks a person does on the job—and the learner must recognize when to use the skill based on what they see on the job. This context is important.

- The best skills-based training only includes knowledge content that a person must know in order to use the skill and do the job. Additional content creates cognitive overload—focus on the skill.

- Steps are chunked in sizes appropriate to the audience's needs, e.g., their available time and learning environment.

- Practice is always included, and it is as close to the real world as possible. And practice always includes *meaningful* feedback, not simply correct or incorrect.

- Is the training something like DEIB where the goal is a change in perspective as much as anything else? Adding structured reflection so that the learner can consider the topic in the context of their own experience or work life is required to see the transformation you are seeking.

WHAT DOES LEARNER-CENTERED SKILL-BUILDING LOOK LIKE?

And what about learner-centered design? What are its attributes?

It's built upon a deep understanding of the learner: their environment, challenges, learning preferences, desires, etc.

The training objectives and the learner's goals are in sync. The learning makes it clear what the objectives are so the learner can see how the objectives match with their goals—making the training worthy of their time.

It allows for learner choice in length of the session, topics, and perhaps even modality.

Effective skills-based training must be designed with a deep understanding of the specific learner in mind. If the program is too easy, or teaches what is already known, the *expertise reversal effect* kicks in and the rest of the program may be less effective. Too hard and there is a lack of flow and engagement, and again the learning is ineffective.

But what if you are teaching thousands of learners the same skill? How might global organizations offer training that's at the right level for each learner? Actually, there is a pretty easy answer. Learner-centered design suggests that allowing learner choice—in topic, modality, session length—increases engagement and motivation, which are linked to stronger positive outcomes in mastery.

Two other hallmarks of great performance-based learning are also learner-centered design friendly. Clearly providing the learning objectives makes it possible for learners to find modules that overlap with their own goals. And lifelike practice situates the learning squarely in the learner's context, so the learning will "stick" when they get back to their workstation.

The takeaway: If you want effective skills-based learning, lean on the principles of learner-centered design. Lean in hard to partnering with your learners as you design the learning experience—let them help guide you to the best experience for them. If you do, you'll reap the benefits of having first-class performance-based learning that effectively addresses your business needs and enhances the employee experience.

CASE STUDY: **CAPGEMINI CONNECTED MANAGER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

A high-energy, highly social virtual leadership training experience that breaks the "fourth wall" of the screen with epic events, close-knit peer groups, and hands-on application of new mindsets and practices. Winner of 5 Brandon Hall Group HCM Excellence Awards.

The Challenge

Think back to the Great Virtual Pivot of 2020: Imagine you're now leading a new team spread across several time zones and countries, and you need to bond with your new employees, create a shared mission, and adjust to new norms, hours, and cultural differences—all in time to meet with clients and seamlessly deliver the quality, agility, and thought leadership they've come to expect from your company.

That would be a tall order for everyone. But for the 90,000 middle managers at Capgemini, a cutting-edge global consulting, technology, and digital transformation company, this challenge was a reality.

CASE STUDY: **CAPGEMINI CONNECTED MANAGER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

These new teams needed to bond and unite around a shared purpose. But first, they needed a leader, supporter, cheerleader, and advisor to show them the way.

Capgemini middle managers needed an entirely new collection of skills and mindsets. They needed to become *Connected Managers* who were prepared to lead in the new normal.
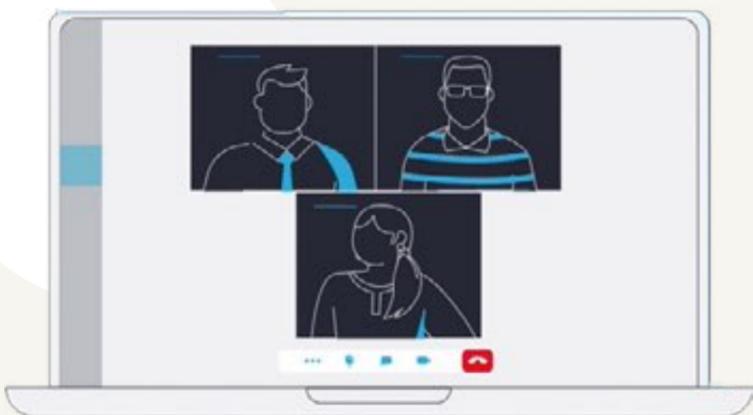
OUR GOALS:
Engaged and efficient Flexible Work teams and a trust-based managerial culture that thrives

The Solution

Connected Manager is an innovative leadership development program created by Capgemini and SweetRush designed to help managers engage and connect with their teams.

Connected Manager accomplishes the monumental task of prioritizing human connection and shifting mindsets while delivering an innovative, highly scalable leadership program.

CASE STUDY: **CAPGEMINI CONNECTED MANAGER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

Learners are matched with six to eight peers (called a "pod") who will support, coach, and cheer one another on during the transformative 12-week journey.

Learner Journey — Capgemini University

START HERE

Join a Pod
Join a small group of peers all along the learning journey.

Learner Dashboard
Helps you navigate easily, gain badges and track your progress.

3P — Proximity, Performance, Perspective

OPENING CEREMONY
Kick off your journey with a live session with your pod and other peers worldwide.

TEAM RITUALS
eLearning module & peer-to-peer session

Your first opportunity to connect, discuss, and share best practices with your pod.

CLOSING CEREMONY
Recognition
Celebration
Co-signed Certificate
Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning & Capgemini University

3P MODEL

Microlearning
Self-directed learning using Harvard Spark content.

Pod Case Study
Reflect and practice with your pod through a selected case study.

Interactive Practice
Self-directed learning through a branching scenario to deepen your knowledge.

Pod Capstone
A final comprehensive learning activity with your pod.

CASE STUDY: **CAPGEMINI CONNECTED MANAGER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

Once matched, pod members attend an epic live opening ceremony that doubles as their first pod meeting. Rituals like the opening ceremony anchor learners as they move through the three *Connected Manager* mindset shifts, or pillars—*Proximity*, *Perspective*, and *Performance*—that will support the transformation of Capgemini's management practice.

Proximity
To: a manager who...

Focuses on a nuanced relationship with employees.

3Ps

Perspective
To: a manager who...

Believes it is their responsibility to structure an ongoing conversation for their team about career, mobility, and balance.

Performance
To: a manager who...

Understands that it is their role to put in place the best working conditions for their employees, with trust and communication as a base.

True to its name, the program is founded in connection: Managers practice "walking the walk" of connected virtual management as they take turns leading live group activities and discussions with their pods.

With its multiple modalities and bite-sized eLearning content, *Connected Manager* meets every learner where they are, whether they have three minutes or three hours to devote to learning.

CASE STUDY: **CAPGEMINI CONNECTED MANAGER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

The program includes microlearning content created by Harvard management experts delivered via the Degreed platform and interactive practice via branching scenarios that challenge them to think on their feet and respond to authentic management situations.

Increased team engagement scores on certified managers' teams prove that the *Connected Manager* leadership development program is transforming management practices across Capgemini's enterprise.

And *Connected Manager's* 98% net promoter score (NPS) shows that the program is succeeding as a bright spot for managers and their teams.

> **Expectations of our people towards their managers have drastically changed the last decade. We need to support them to change their mindset, behaviors, to practice new rituals in a trust environment, and upskill on how to be more proactive in different scenarios.**
>
> **This became our *Connected Manager* program: a fun, innovative and connected experience designed for what they need now and in the future to succeed as leaders. We are so proud of what this program is accomplishing for our business and the development of our people.**
>
> —*Marie Dupuy, Head of Learner Experience and Innovation at Capgemini University*

FURTHER READING ON

SKILLS AND LEARNER-CENTERED DESIGN FROM THE SWEETRUSH TEAM

Is Your L&D Team Ready to Meet the Employee Skills Development Challenge? ▶

The L&D Trifecta: Why Agility, Adaptability, And Resilience Top The List Of In-Demand Skills ▶

12 Tips for Using Power Skills to Create the Workplace of the Future ▶
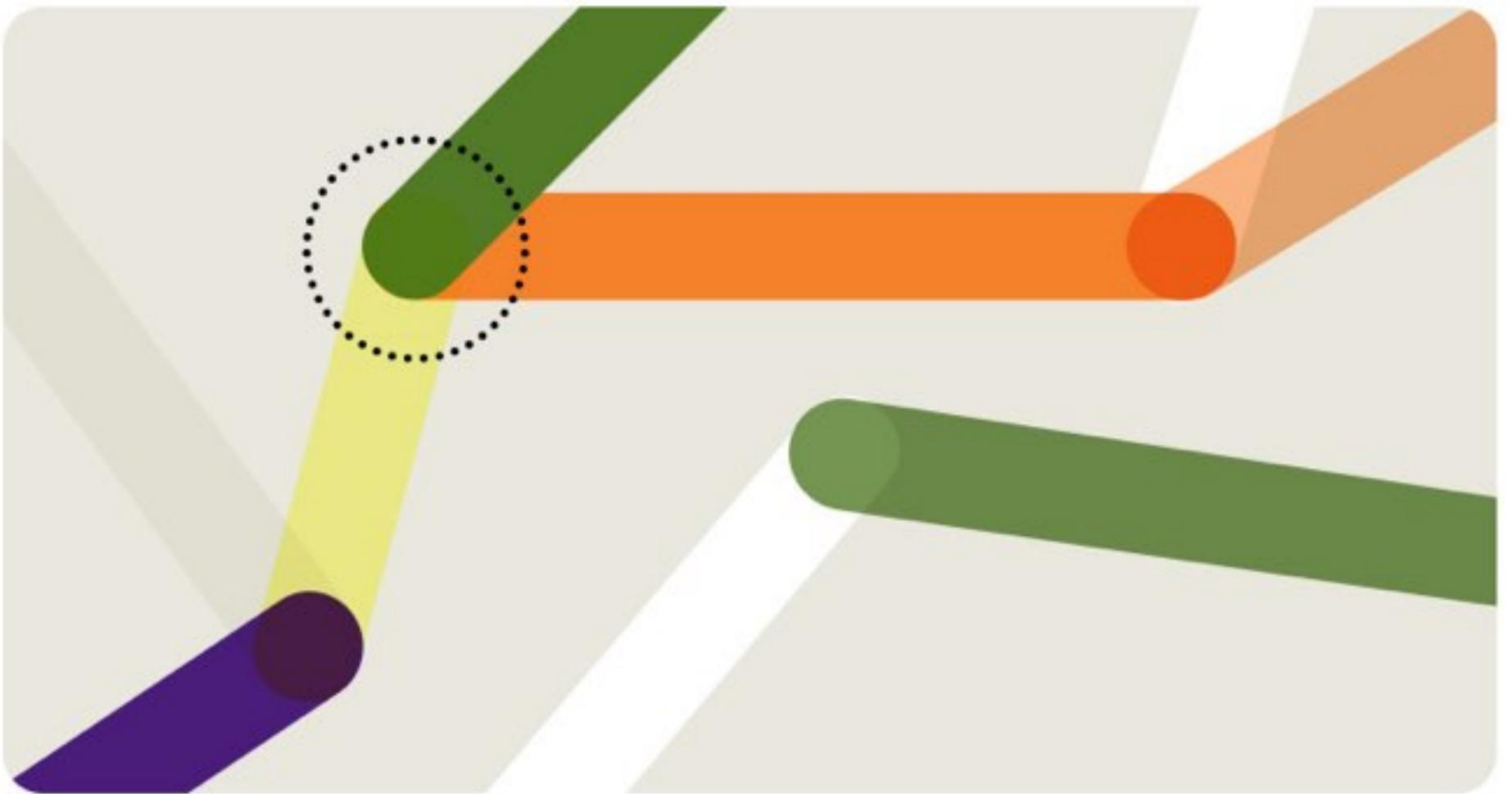
4 Truths Of Human-Centered Learning Design ▶

Use the Design Thinking Process to Create Learner-Centric Blended Learning and Deliver Value! ▶

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Section 2
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: L&D'S INTEGRAL ROLE IN BUSINESS STRATEGY

We've now lived through the Great Resignation, the Great Reshuffle, quiet quitting, and despite economic uncertainty, the labor market remains tight. PWC's *2023 CEO Survey* indicates that **73% of CEOs believe employee attrition rates will continue on pace or increase.**[6] One big solution to retain top talent: learning and growth opportunities.

Combine this with the business imperative to improve adaptability in the face of change, along with efficiency and productivity, and the shift from jobs to skills—L&D's seat at the strategy table is becoming more secure. Yet age-old challenges (learner engagement) remain, and new ones (our uncertain economic environment) are emerging.

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6 https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/c-suite-insights/ceo-survey-2023.html#how-do-your-resilience-and-your-workforce-strategies-fit-together

TOP L&D ORG CHALLENGES:
ALL PARTICIPANTS

We asked survey participants to choose the top 5 challenges in their L&D department or organization.

2023 Ranking	Challenge	%	Change	2022 Ranking
1	Future-proofing the organization to address skill gaps	43.6%	new	n/a
2	Creating a culture of learning	39.6%	=	2
3	Providing engaging learning experiences	37.1%	↓	1
4	Elevating the strategic position of L&D	36.7%	↑	9
5	Building learning programs in an uncertain economic environment	36.7%	new	n/a
6	Keeping up with the needs of the business; your L&D team's capacity	34.2%	↓	3
7	Tying learning needs to business objectives	33.1%	↑	8
8	Providing employees with learning and growth opportunities	29.5%	↓	7
9	Using data to improve learning or prove learning effectiveness	28.7%	↓	6
10	Designing and delivering effective learning for remote and hybrid workplaces	27.6%	↓	4
11	Adopting new technologies for learning	26.2%	↓	5
12	Diversifying and expanding L&D team capabilities	25.8%	↓	10
13	Using learning to attract and retain employees across the organization	25.8%	↓	11
14	Adequately addressing emerging learner needs (e.g., transformation, resilience, adaption)	18.2%	↓	12
15	Delivering learning in a timely manner, when it's needed	17.8%	↓	14

TOP L&D ORG CHALLENGES:
L&D LEADERS

*Here's what L&D leaders had to say about their top 5 challenges
in their L&D department or organization.*

2023 Ranking				2022 Ranking
1	Future-proofing the organization to address skill gaps	49.5%	new	n/a
2	Keeping up with the needs of the business; your L&D team's capacity	45.0%	=	2
3	Creating a culture of learning	42.2%	↓	1
4	Elevating the strategic position of L&D in your organization	37.6%	↓	3
5	Building learning programs in an uncertain economic environment	37.6%	new	n/a
6	Providing engaging learning experiences	33.9%	↓	4
7	Tying learning needs to business objectives	33.0%	↑	9
8	Providing employees with learning and growth opportunities	30.3%	↓	7
9	Using learning to attract and retain employees across the organization	28.4%	↑	10
10	Using data to improve learning or prove learning effectiveness	24.8%	↓	5
11	Designing and delivering effective learning for remote and hybrid workplaces	23.9%	↓	8
12	Diversifying and expanding L&D team capabilities	22.9%	=	12
13	Defining and assessing skills in a consistent way	22.0%	↑	14
14	Adopting new technologies for learning	20.2%	↓	6
15	Grappling with an increasingly complex L&D technology ecosystem	14.7%	=	15

L&D becomes more integral to broader HR and business success

A new addition to the survey, **future-proofing to address skill gaps,** landed squarely at #1. Add that to the jump for **elevating the strategic position of L&D** (#9 in 2022 to #4 in 2023) and **tying learning needs to business objectives** (#8 in 2022 to #7 this year), and you see the growth of L&D as an emerging force in business strategy. As companies shift with greater speed and frequency, L&D needs to be ready—and in front of—those changes to serve people and business needs.

> **In difficult economic situations, future-proofing is the number one argument the L&D department has for the value they bring to the business.**
>
> —*Andrei Hedstrom, SweetRush CEO*

L&D is also more attuned to the role it plays in employee experience and retention—leaders once again included "growth opportunities" and "attract and retain employees" in their top 10 challenges.

93%

of organizations
are concerned about
employee retention

Providing learning opportunities is the #1 way organizations are working to improve retention.

Source: LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report[7]

7 https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report

Learner engagement continues to be a core challenge

Providing engaging learning experiences (#3) continues to be high on the list of challenges for everyone surveyed. The high pace of change means that leaders and lines of business are demanding faster time to market with learning programs, and a higher likelihood that content will be out-of-date (and need to be updated) sooner. Neither of these conditions is ideal for higher-interactivity online learning, such as games and simulations.

Even so, respondents shared the desire for enhancing creativity, quality, and innovation in L&D, especially through programs that offer learning in the flow of work. We're creating more programs that blend marketing communications and learning; experiences that leverage email and video combined with simple, maintainable eLearning content.

The new business as usual: remote/hybrid design and using data

Interesting to look at the biggest drops from last year: **designing and delivering effective learning for remote and hybrid workplaces** (#4 in 2022 to #10 this year), **using data to improve learning or prove learning effectiveness** (#6 in 2022 to #9 in 2023), and **adopting new technologies for learning** (#5 to #11). The digital transformation of learning, accelerated by the pandemic, forced L&D to design in new ways and implement new tools. As we move into 2023, these once painful shifts have become the new normal.

Data is coming to its own and is seen as business as usual, but we haven't pushed the envelope. This could be the year where we truly understand the impact of learning on the business.

—*John Cleave, Senior Learning Engineer at SweetRush*

INSIGHTS

HOW TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR ORGANIZATION WITH L&D

By **Annie Hodson**, Director of Client Solutions,
and **Gail Eisenstein**, Learning Architect Team Lead

In today's fast-paced world, the most successful companies put people at the center of the fast-moving changes—largely driven by rapid technology advances—we're all experiencing. They understand that nothing can be accomplished without the support and engagement of their workforce. By investing in their people, these companies create a culture of innovation, collaboration, and growth. They future-proof their business by adapting to **new challenges, seizing opportunities, and staying ahead of the competition.**

If any of us had a crystal ball to see the future, we probably wouldn't still be working at our day jobs! But crystal balls aside, there are real, concrete things we can do in the learning and development world to help businesses of all sizes and industries stay ahead of the curve. **How can you ensure that employees have the skills, knowledge, and tools they need to adapt today and to thrive tomorrow?**

Here are a few ideas:

1 Embrace technology

Leverage new technologies and digital tools to help employees enhance their skills, increase their knowledge, and improve their performance on the job. This can include **online learning platforms, virtual reality training, and gamification techniques.** Ask yourself how you can tap into new tech with a focus on increasing productivity, efficiency, and quality of work. These are the areas that will ultimately boost the bottom line and drive business growth.

2 Foster a culture of continuous learning

Create opportunities for employees to take ownership of their own learning and development, making sure there's space to learn and grow

HOW TO FUTURE PROOF YOUR ORGANIZATION WITH L&D

both inside and outside of the workplace. This might include **mentorship programs, industry events and conferences, and online resources such as certification programs, webinars, and podcasts.**

3

Measure and evaluate outcomes

As the legendary author who is often referred to as the founder of management thinking, Peter Drucker once said, "What gets measured gets managed."

Set clear goals and objectives and track progress toward them. Regular measurement and reporting will keep you focused, and you can use that information to **make decisions to improve your results in both the short and long term.** If you're not measuring outcomes, you won't be able to speak the language of senior leadership.

4

Make learning and development a strategic priority

To truly future-proof learning and development initiatives, you must make them a strategic priority. This commitment requires aligning learning initiatives with your company's overall goals and objectives, and investing in them accordingly. **Use your measurement data, and work closely with your organization's leaders** to ensure that initiatives are given the attention and resources they need to succeed. Help your organization move away from viewing L&D as a cost to recognizing L&D as an essential part of future growth.

Future-proofing a business isn't about predicting what's to come. For L&D professionals and business leaders, **future-proofing is about equipping employees with the skills and knowledge they need to adapt to new challenges** so they can seize opportunities that will arise.

By embracing technology, fostering a culture of continuous learning, measuring outcomes, and making learning and development a strategic priority, companies can position themselves for success now and tomorrow. As learning and development leaders, it's our job to help companies make this happen. Let's work together to future-proof our businesses, building the internal capabilities and capacities to thrive regardless of the change that comes our way.

INSIGHTS

HOW TO THINK ABOUT LEARNING ANALYTICS IN 2023

By **John Cleave,** Senior Learning Engineer, and **Danielle Hart**, Chief Brand Officer

We live in a world of data—it's never been easier to collect and visualize. More than ever, we're using data to make decisions about how and how rapidly to adjust course to serve our business and our people better.

That's why it's so frustrating that, for the most part, learning analytics has not been keeping pace with other areas of the business. We can debate the reasons for this (resources, capabilities, fear), but fortunately we are seeing from our survey and our clients that the tide is starting to turn.

As you're looking at ways to improve, **consider the two basic flavors of learning analytics: summative** (did the learning achieve its objectives?) and **formative** (how can we make the learning better?).

Summative Analytics:
Focus on Operational Needs and Outcomes

Done well, analytics provide actionable insights that help leaders make better decisions. This isn't about trying to prove to stakeholders that a learning program "worked." It's about helping them, as Trish Uhl puts it, "take advantage of opportunities and solve worthwhile people and business performance problems."[8]

For example, learning analytics can illuminate where skill gaps still exist following a learning program so those gaps can be reduced with targeted support. Learning

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8 https://www.trainingzone.co.uk/develop/business/the-last-mile-turning-insights-into-actions-in-workplace-learning-analytics

HOW TO THINK ABOUT LEARNING ANALYTICS IN 2023

analytics can also point to a correlation between learners' past work or learning experiences and time to proficiency with a new skill, which can then improve recruiting.

Learning analytics—combined with people analytics—are key to aligning what capabilities are needed for a given role (demand) with learners' skills, experience, and interests (supply).

It's great if you can show a high ROI with a learning program, but to really elevate your learning analytics, focus on helping your stakeholders decide what needs to be done next.

Formative Analytics:
Focus on Learner Experience

The other flavor of learning analytics helps L&D professionals make better decisions about learning design and delivery. That might not matter much to stakeholders, but it's up to us to use data-driven insights to improve our craft and the experience for learners.

SweetRush is exploring ways to bake formative learning analytics into our development processes through xAPI, which can record learners' click-by-click interactions. This can help us identify how to make a learning experience more powerful and relevant, augmenting content in needed areas and de-emphasizing content that doesn't provide value. If a project team is building a series of modules, it might build a prototype and roll it out in a pilot to record clicks, views, and scrolls via xAPI, and to embed surveys. This data can then be used to improve the entire program.

We also believe there's great promise in using learning analytics to drive adaptive learning: **By deeply understanding how learning experiences contribute to skill development and career success, and what individuals can and can't do, we're in a position to provide tailored guidance to each learner on that learner's journey.** This means faster time to proficiency and higher learner buy-in to training.

FURTHER READING ON

L&D STRATEGY AND LEARNING ANALYTICS FROM THE SWEETRUSH TEAM

L&D Leaders:
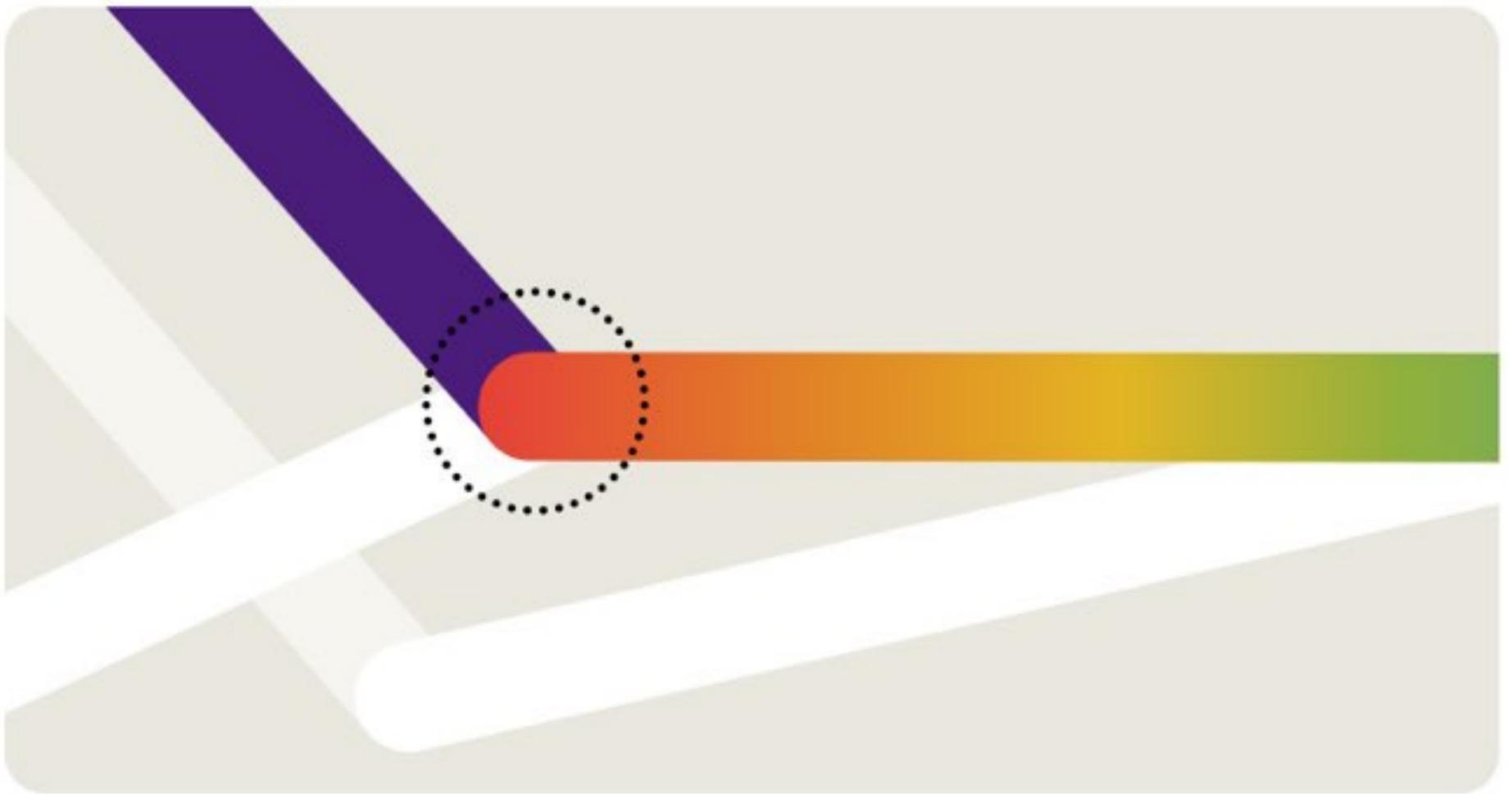The Time Has Come For A Mindset Shift ▶

How Needs Analysis Can Help Solve
The Learning Analytics Challenge ▶

Beyond the Smile Sheet:
Measuring Level 1 to Improve Learning Design ▶

Section 3
MEETING THE NEED FOR SPEED IN LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN

We've established that business changes are coming fast and furious. Now consider that everything in our consumer world is being optimized toward instant delivery. It's hard to fault stakeholders for wanting the same thing from learning. And it's no surprise, then, that the biggest and loudest challenge for learning experience designers is **the pressure to get more done faster.**

Yet it's through these types of challenges and constraints that innovations emerge. We've seen it in blending off-the-shelf and custom content in learning journeys. Or surrounding LXP content curation tools with social learning programs to integrate practice and reflection. **And now we're seeing it with AI.** Learning experience designers are working with a broader set of tools, embracing new ways of working, and taking calculated risks— balancing business needs while keeping learners at the center of their craft.

TOP CONTENT CREATION CHALLENGES
ALL PARTICIPANTS

We asked survey participants to choose their top 5 content creation challenges.

2023 Ranking				2022 Ranking
1	Creating adaptive or personalized learning experiences	44.4%	new	n/a
2	Shifting to learner-centric training experiences (i.e., less prescription, more choice and self-direction)	39.3%	=	2
3	Budget constraints	36.0%	new	n/a
4	Heightening learner engagement and experience	35.6%	↓	1
5	Addressing the perception that good learning can be created very quickly (timeline reality check!)	31.3%	=	5
6	Lack of time to conduct a needs analysis	30.5%	↑	9
7	Lack of stakeholder interest in conducting needs analysis	28.7%	↑	8
8	Partnering with and extracting knowledge from subject matter experts	28.4%	↓	4
9	Designing for remote and hybrid work environment	28.0%	↓	3
10	Difficulty tying learning needs to business objectives	26.9%	↓	7
11	Collaborating on content development: bringing the different disciplines together	26.9%	↓	6
12	Lack of L&D experience or expertise in conducting a needs analysis	25.8%	↓	11
13	Lack of L&D experience or expertise in developing evaluation strategy or solutions beyond level 2	20.4%	↑	16
14	Lack of existing content or resources to leverage	19.6%	↓	10
15	Lack of leadership/sponsorship support for new content	19.3%	=	15

TOP CONTENT CREATION CHALLENGES

L&D LEADERS vs. INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

L&D Leaders		Individual Contributors
Creating adaptive or personalized learning experiences	1	Creating adaptive or personalized learning experiences
Shifting to learner-centric training experiences (i.e., less prescription, more choice and self-direction)	2	Lack of time to conduct a needs analysis
Budget constraints	3	Heightening learner engagement and experience
Heightening learner engagement and experience	4	Shifting to learner-centric training experiences (i.e., less prescription, more choice and self-direction)
Addressing the perception that good learning can be created very quickly (timeline reality check!)	5	Budget constraints
Lack of time to conduct a needs analysis	6	Lack of stakeholder interest in conducting needs analysis
Lack of stakeholder interest in conducting needs analysis	7	Addressing the perception that good learning can be created very quickly (timeline reality check!)
Partnering with and extracting knowledge from subject matter experts	8	Lack of L&D experience or expertise in conducting a needs analysis
Designing for remote and hybrid work environments	9	Designing for remote and hybrid work environments
Difficulty tying learning needs to business objectives	10	Difficulty tying learning needs to business objectives

The future of learning is self-directed and learner-owned

The days of simply dishing up mandatory courses are waning, and the push is on for learners to take responsibility for their own growth and development, from setting goals to taking action. The rise of alternative education platforms like Coursera indicates "**employees want to own their own career path and reskill or upskill for themselves**," says Annie Hodson, SweetRush Director of Client Solutions.

Still, the challenge remains to get tools and resources easily available to learners so they can direct their own transformation.

> **Our challenge is a learning culture and making learning a normal part of work. Outside of new hire training, it is hard to drive continuous learning. We need to ensure we have relevant content that is easily accessible and easy to consume while still being effective and more than a 'check-the-box' activity.**

—*L&D Leader*

> **We have a variety of tools and systems available, but at the same time that makes it hard for our learner to know where to start. It would be great to start with 'Learn how to Learn' again with our target audience. [That's] what we are trying to do this year.**

—*L&D Leader*

Early signs of the return of in-person training

We're three years into the pandemic-fueled digital transformation of learning. Content creators have a better understanding of their learning design toolbox for remote/ hybrid learning. **Designing for remote and hybrid work environments** took the biggest fall in our survey, from #3 in 2022 to #9 this year.

So now that we've got more tools and experience than ever to make digital learning better, it's time to bring face-to-face (F2F) learning back, right? Maybe so.

"We are starting to get more requests for F2F training because people miss all the "learning" that happens organically during these types of events," said one L&D professional.

And yet, their team is "focused on scaling learning experiences, which is heavily reliant on digital tech."

This renewed interest in F2F coincides with a new report that indicates working from home may be plateauing in the U.S.[9]

Organizations that had little or no telework

72.5%

August - September 2022

60.1%

July - September 2021

Source: U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics [9]

As employees return to the office (whether by choice or not), they'll naturally start to ask for more in-person learning opportunities.

9 https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/remote-work-dropped-from-2021-to-2022.aspx

(Not enough) time on our hands

Learning experience designers are definitely feeling extreme time pressure (case in point from one learning leader: "The idea that we can put together a three-month onboarding curriculum with certifications in 60 days."). ICs cited their #2 challenge is **lack of time for needs analysis**, and **time to create learning** shows up again at #7.

But they're not alone.

It's stakeholders.

Getting partner stakeholders to invest the necessary time for projects to move forward.

It's SMEs.

...they are the ones with the knowledge and, some of them do not have the extra time for this.

And it's learners.

Time commitment for the employee is the #1 piece of feedback we receive. They do not have time to test, pilot, or even take.

Changing our fraught relationship with time will require a balance of approaches.

- Building the business case for the time investment by putting purpose at the center: Why does this program matter? Why, in the midst of our other priorities, should we focus on it? What does success look like, and what will it take to achieve it?

- Taking a step back to look at our constraints and then experimenting with new ways to make our work better and more efficient. Using tools from design thinking has helped us accelerate solution design, and there are so many possibilities emerging with AI.

- As our Learning Architect Team Lead Gail Eisenstein says, "Given the fast pace of everything, we need to prioritize making a program feel manageable—to the learner and to the learning operations apparatus within the organization that needs to execute the program."

" As we are focusing a lot of our work on digital, we especially have the challenge that if we work on a learning program for several months, by the time we release something, it could be that it is already outdated.

The biggest questions that keep us up at night are:

How do we get content out faster?
How do we then ensure that this content is engaging?
How do we get the learner to apply the learning quickly?

—L&D Manager

INSIGHTS

SPEAKING YOUR STAKEHOLDER'S LANGUAGE: HOW TO GET BUY-IN AND TIME TO CONDUCT A NEEDS ANALYSIS

By **Emma Klosson,** Learning Evangelist and Senior Instructional Designer

Needs analysis continues to be a challenge for L&D professionals.

60%

of respondents ranked needs analysis among their top five content creation challenges.

When asked to expand on the specific barriers they're encountering, **two themes emerged: finding the time to conduct a needs analysis and getting stakeholder buy-in.**

These appear to be disparate themes, yet they're intrinsically linked. After all, if L&D can convince stakeholders about the value of a needs analysis, we should (in theory) be granted the time to do it properly.

So how do we convince stakeholders of the value of needs analysis?

The long answer, as we reveal in our *Needs Analysis Playbook: How to Make L&D a Trusted Partner in Your Organization*, requires us to adopt a mindset shift. One in which we move away from the role of order-taker and toward that of a consultant.

SPEAKING YOUR STAKEHOLDER'S LANGUAGE

The short answer is that we need to speak our stakeholders' language.
I would even go as far to say that we need to remove the words "needs analysis" from our vocabulary entirely when speaking with stakeholders.

Think about it for a moment; stakeholders are interested in one thing only: results.

They're not interested in the ins and outs of how we get there. They just want us to deliver the results they're looking for.

That said, they *should be* interested in engaging in conversations to uncover what success looks like to them and what, specifically, the expected outcomes or results must look like. They should also be fully prepared to explain:

What
the underlying problem is that needs to be solved and how it surfaced.

Why
it's important for the business to solve the problem, and what are the risks of doing nothing.

Who
the problem impacts the most and what these folks are doing now vs. what they should be doing after a solution is put in place.

What,
if any, barriers they anticipate as it relates to the adoption and implementation of a solution. (What might prevent the solution from being a success?)

In business terms, this would be called a *consultation* or *discovery conversation*. In the L&D vernacular, it's a *stakeholder analysis* and forms the basis of the needs analysis process.

○ **SPEAKING YOUR STAKEHOLDER'S LANGUAGE**

*So how does this conversation help you get buy-in and time to
do a needs analysis?*

Truthfully? When you have this conversation with the stakeholder (and you really
must have this conversation. every. single. time.), **you won't need buy-in or
"permission" for needs analysis**. Why? **Because you'll use the findings from
this conversation to lead what happens next,** *including* any additional needs
analysis activities that are required.

Here's how.

Take charge of the needs analysis process!

After meeting with the stakeholder, prepare a brief report (of no more than
1-2 pages) that clearly summarizes the business need, who it affects, and what the
desired outcomes are.

Then, list the steps you will take to solve the problem. This list should include
more needs analysis activities such as "conversations with the affected population"
(i.e., *audience analysis* and *performance gap analysis*), and "gathering and
reviewing existing training resources" (content mapping and analysis). Include a
brief rationale for each and be sure to tie it back to your findings.

By consulting with stakeholders on their needs, speaking to them in a
language they understand, and linking your process to their needs,
you'll build trust and gain credibility. You'll eliminate the necessity to
seek permission and instead focus on results!

FURTHER READING ON

LEARNING CONTENT CREATION FROM THE SWEETRUSH TEAM

The Needs Analysis Playbook:
How to Make L&D a Trusted Partner in Your Organization ▶

Buy, Build, or Blend?
Use Cases for Off-the-Shelf and Custom eLearning ▶

Learning Journey Pit Stops And Nature
Can Beat Screen Fatigue ▶

Be Our Guest:
A Service Design Approach To Learner Experience ▶
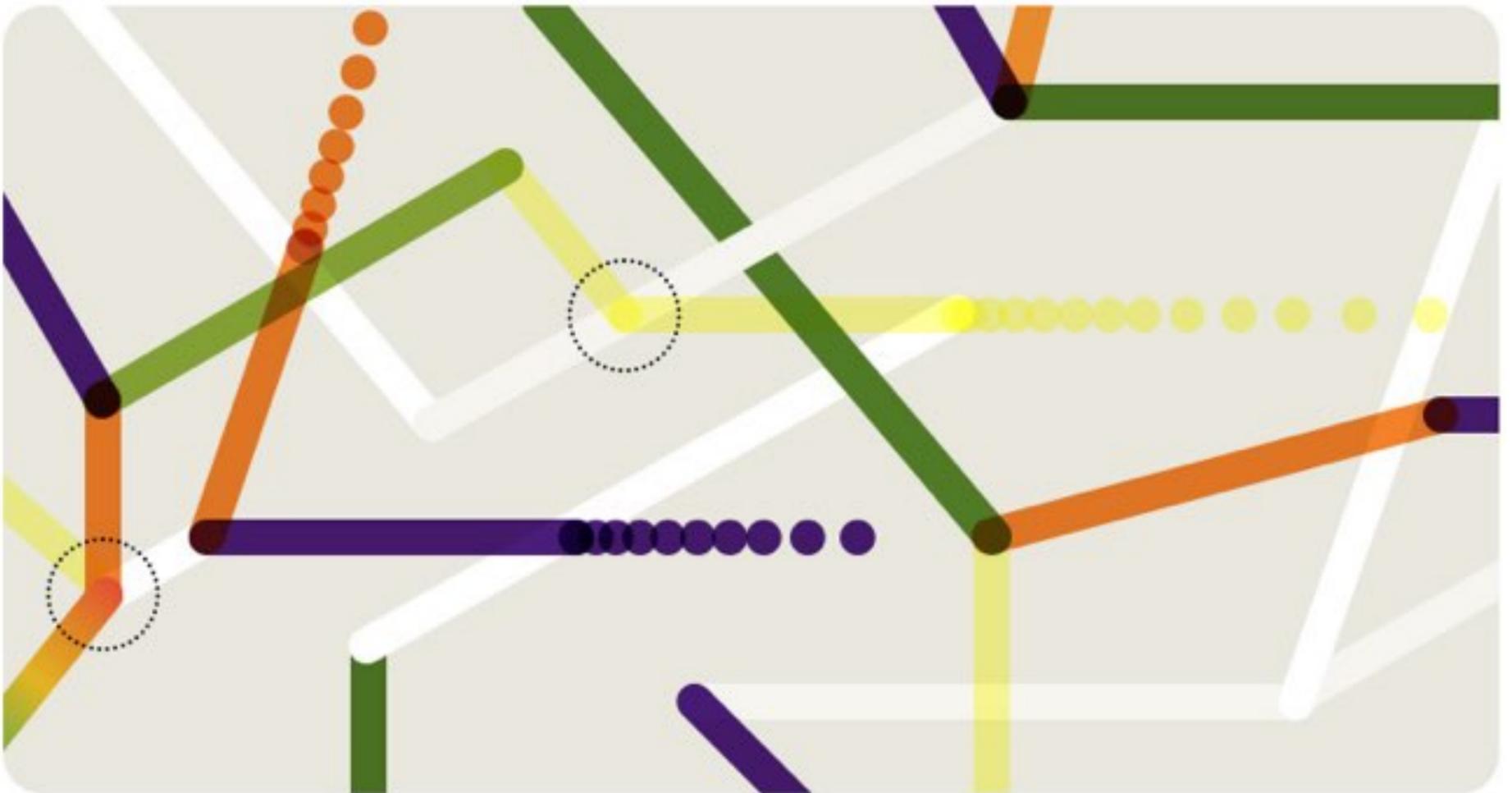
Section 4
SKILLS, TECHNOLOGY, AND CONNECTION

This year's responses saw a rise in three key areas: skills (**upskilling, reskilling, use of skills taxonomies**), technology (**analytics, immersive tech, and AI**), and connection (**informal and social learning, collaboration**).

WHAT L&D WILL BE DOING MORE OF IN 2023

Upskilling/reskilling (frequency and scale)

Upskilling L&D (instructional design + development)

Agile practices

Skills taxonomies

The Metaverse

SKILLS

THE L&D TEAM

TECHNOLOGY

LEARNING DESIGN

Collaborating with talent org disciplines

Doing more with less budget and staff

Learning analytics and evaluation

Content analysis

Immersive Tech/XR

AI for Learning

Coaching and mentoring

Virtual-first vs. classroom-first

Internet of Things

Informal and social learning

Third-party /curated content

Design thinking

WHAT L&D PROS ARE EXCITED TO LEARN IN 2023

Organizational Development in Healthcare

Machine Learning Mobile-Learning Conflict Resolution

Just-in-Time-Learning Customization Adaptive Learning

Accessibility Skills-Based Learning New Learning Technologies XR

Social Media Immersive Learning

Content Trainers Upskilling Design Thinking

VR eLearning Sourcing

Curation Hybrid

Untraditional Tools Authoring Tools

content Virtual Learning

AI VILT ILT Chat GPT

Learning Diversity Coaching Strategy Leadership

Self-Credential Courses Skills LMS

LXP

IoT Integration Training Upskilling

Metaverse Change-Management New Tools

Digital World Team Building Microlearning

Collaborative Learning AR New-Tech

Learning Experiences new ways Simulations

Social-Learning Platform Interactive Learning

Micro-Learning

Articulate Rise Internet Learning Online

Engaging New Learning Platforms Skilling my team eLearning Trends

Rapid Development Virtual Training Learners Interactive Leadership Development

Learning Experience Platforms Learner-Centric Gamification Learning Development

Upskilling my L&D team Human Connection Hybrid Learning

Social-Learning Certification Informal Learning Engaging Assessments

Immersive Learning Talent Marketplaces

Upskilling my team

INSIGHTS

USING AI IN L&D IN 2023

By **John Cleave,** Senior Learning Engineer, and **Emily Dale**, Learning Architect

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is, at its root, a broad family of clever algorithms and data storage mechanisms that have become steadily easier to build and apply, leading to rapid advances across industries. Few doubt that AI is reshaping our world, including the world of L&D. Here are some areas we find especially intriguing:

1 **Curation.** AI is being used by many platforms to find training relevant to a learner's needs and interests: systems crawl the web and/or an organization's intranet and tag content based on skill, application, context, level of treatment, and/or whatever, enabling the system to present content that's helpful to a learner in a given situation, so they don't have to hunt for it.

2 **Natural language processing (NLP).** Learners are more adept at talking than at navigating menus and screens; advances in NLP provide opportunities for learners to type or say what they seek, and the system then delivers accordingly (think Siri). It's also being used to improve learning by doing: For example, SweetRush developed a call-center simulation for a financial services client that allows new hires to speak to a simulated customer and hear responses in a back-and-forth conversation that's more authentic than a branching simulation.

3 **Information delivery.** Large Language Models (LLMs) such as GPT can answer learners' questions via natural language dialogue between learner and machine. Countless L&D professionals, including many at SweetRush, are actively exploring how to become better "AI Whisperers" to leverage this capability to achieve L&D outcomes. One of the challenges here is quality assurance: How do you make sure that the information an LLM provides is accurate and without bias since no one has absolute control over or understanding of the layers of its neural network?

USING AI IN L&D IN 2023

4 **Generated assets.** A number of vendors are using AI to create images, voiceovers, and video, which L&D developers can incorporate into learning experience design to lower costs, shorten time to delivery, and allow easier maintenance. Creatives can also use AI to create training assets, which opens up new vistas for iterative design.

5 **Future skills.** AI is being used by many vendors to harvest terabytes of data from resumes and job postings in order to identify future skills and capabilities and build complex skill graphs. This promises to provide learners with guidance in reskilling and upskilling in order to advance their careers and achieve their life potential, and it gives organizations deeper insight into where they need to focus their recruiting and talent development efforts to equip their workforce to handle change that is ever more frequent.

SweetRush believes that, while AI has made many inroads into L&D, the human isn't going away. AI lacks genuine empathy with and understanding of learners, so we believe the role of L&D professionals will be to apply their practiced understanding of how people learn to shape AI models and keep training learner-centered. The machine cannot do it alone.

INSIGHTS

WHAT IS A COACHING MINDSET AND HOW CAN YOU SCALE IT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

By **Hanan Harb,** Learning Evangelist

Coaching mindset ranked in the top five of the most in-demand skills for employees in organizations today. So, what exactly is a coaching mindset?

I spoke with two coaches about this skill set and what it means for employees and organizations today. Dané Johnson is a coach and senior culture consultant for SweetRush Transforming Leaders & Culture (TLC), and Joelle Jackson is a conscious leadership coach and author of *Unlock Your Conscious Leadership.*

How do you define "coaching mindset"?

Dané: Like a growth mindset, **a coaching mindset is the belief that everyone can grow and expand their skills.**

In a coaching mindset, you believe that it's an essential part of your role as a leader to help others realize and use their knowledge and skills and help them expand their capacity as individuals and as members of a team.

Joelle: The core competencies of a coaching mindset are nonjudgement, active listening, curiosity, compassion, and empathy. **To develop this skill, you need to do your inner work first.**

WHAT IS A COACHING MINDSET AND HOW CAN YOU SCALE IT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

When you have conversations with others, if you are not at a place of peace with yourself—consciously leading your thoughts, emotions, energy blocks, and ego—how are you able to connect and listen (rather than trying to formulate an answer)?

A lot of discord we see in the world is rooted in fear, distrust, and a feeling of being threatened. With a coaching mindset, people don't feel that way because it deepens psychological safety.

How can an organization *scale* a coaching mindset?

Dané: Scaling a coaching mindset is a **culture initiative**. It starts with the top layers of leadership. *How does leadership want to define success in achieving this goal?* Once that's defined, you roll out training and support to managers, providing motivation and inspiration for people to adopt this mindset. There needs to be strategic communication around the benefits. Determine how you can **insert teaching moments in mechanisms and structures already in place**, such as one-on-ones, all hands, and team meetings.

Joelle: Organizations can start implementing programs like culture transformation. In addition to the leaders, focus on new hires and individual contributors. Give everyone the skills to articulate the benefits of a coaching mindset. **How can a person be expected to be promoted to a leader if they don't have the ability to master their thoughts, emotions, and words in a conversation?** This is one of the most important leadership competencies, which we teach in conscious leadership. Everything boils down to **how you have conversations.**

**WHAT IS A COACHING MINDSET AND HOW
CAN YOU SCALE IT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?**

Let's picture an organization that's already scaled the coaching mindset skill. What does this organization look like?

Dané: In an organization with a scaled coaching mindset, **employees are experiencing more satisfaction, creativity, and innovation**. Communication is better. There's less in-fighting, defensiveness, and self-protection. There's more knowledge sharing.

Employees embrace learning and growth. They are asking better questions, getting to the root of customer concerns more quickly, and solving problems with solutions that customers need.

Scaling a coaching mindset helps to **future-proof your organization. Succession planning is more organic** in this type of environment since people aren't as protective of their perceived status. Leaders are able to identify who they want to eventually grow into their roles.

Joelle: It would be utopia! It would change everything. In this organization, employees are highly engaged. Productivity is high. It impacts the bottom line in a positive way. **It's a model to be emulated.**

INSIGHTS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT XR AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING IN 2023

An interview with **Adrian Soto**, Director of Immersive Technologies, and **Danielle Silver**, XR Solution Architect

The promise of immersive learning using XR technologies has been building for several years—and it's now at a **massive pivot point with the [revamp of WebVR content](#)**. WebVR content is solving the challenges of validating and scaling VR, making these immersive experiences available to large audiences *with or without a headset.*

And that's just one thing you need to know about XR in 2023. We talked with immersive learning experts Adrian and Danielle to get their insights.

What's the state of XR and immersive learning in L&D right now?

Danielle: XR technology has matured. Headsets are easier to access than even two years ago. VR used to be a novelty—something cool and shiny to add to a learning portfolio to get attention or simply increase engagement. But now, our clients have realized the value of XR.

They're saying, *how can we integrate immersive technology more intentionally?* We're finding use cases that really shine, where people put their skills to the test. Often this is part of a learning journey that blends eLearning or video, and then VR is the skills application.

What are the use cases for VR that clients are seeking out?

Danielle: We used to see predominantly technical training, situations where using your body for hands-on practice in a safe environment can offer faster time to proficiency and fewer unsafe and expensive errors. Still a great use case.

Now we're seeing a whole spectrum of use cases from human skills, DEIB, and leadership. And we're able to track how people respond in challenging situations, like delivering and receiving feedback, or having difficult conversations. Not just the words they're using, but sentiment and tone. That's really powerful for both skill- building and assessment.

> **We always put learning at the heart of everything that we do. Learning comes first. Our learner comes first.**
>
> *—Danielle Silver, Solution Architect*

What about WebVR content? What is it and how is it changing the game for XR learning?

Danielle: WebVR content is an experience that can be accessed via a headset or desktop computer. This is *really* significant because we have options for how learners consume VR content. No one gets left behind. All learners can access the same content.

Obviously, the headset version is more immersive. But the desktop version is pretty spectacular and engaging. And it's so much easier to scale, especially in a hybrid environment where not everyone is in the office.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT XR AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING IN 2023

If you're not yet ready to invest in thousands of headsets, but you know that VR is something that you want to explore, WebVR content is a great starting point. You can create a proof of concept or prototype and test it out with your audiences.

Adrian: I think a question that someone might have is, why is WebVR content such an important thing now, when it wasn't in the past? It has a lot to do with the evolution of the technology. It's a first step we didn't have before that will allow more companies to get into VR learning.

> **With WebVR content, you can look at more impactful use cases because you can distribute the experience to all of your learners. As we say, no headset, no problem.**
>
> —Adrian Soto, Director of Immersive Technologies

XR seems to evoke a combination of excitement and confusion—wanting to get these new tools to learners but not knowing where to start. How might learning professionals get started if they feel overwhelmed?

Danielle: Technology is always changing. What stays somewhat the same is the science of learning and the principles of adult learning. Knowing how your audience likes to learn and what strategies you can use to impact knowledge, retention, and behavior change, that's 80%. Technology is 20%.

The first step is experiencing this type of learning yourself, then starting to understand how this technology works and how to leverage it in your portfolio or your design. Using your foundation in human-centered design and learning science is essential.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT XR AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING IN 2023

> ❝ **It's an exciting moment for instructional and learning experience designers because where we are right now with XR, they get to make the rules. It's the start of a new technology cycle, so they can jump into this and define it.**

—Adrian Soto, Director of Immersive Technologies

One of the big challenges learning leaders face is understanding, vetting, and creating a strategy to pilot and adopt new learning technologies. How do you consult with clients and help them navigate this?

Adrian: We try to meet clients where they are. It's easy to get overwhelmed as you start your research. We've put a lot of effort into translating our research and knowledge about these technologies into the language of L&D and creating ways clients can experience XR.

The technology is proven now. It works. So the question we're helping clients with is, how is my organization going to adopt it? We're helping them design a strategy or a roadmap. Not to just become early adopters, but to become embracers of this technology and really understand what it means for learning.

If you'd like to find out more about WebVR, XR, and immersive learning, it would make our day to hear from you. Get in touch through our website or reach out directly to Danielle Silver at danielle.silver@sweetrush.com.

FURTHER READING ON

LEARNING TRENDS FROM THE SWEETRUSH TEAM

Extended Reality In Practice:
Six Innovations For The Future of Learning ▶

Three (Not So) Curious Use Cases
For Immersive Learning ▶

The Metaverse: Just A Fad, Or The Future Of L&D? ▶

What's in the Metaverse for Us? ▶

Conclusion
KEEPING UP, STAYING FOCUSED, AND WORKING ON WHAT MATTERS

I wake up every morning determined to both change the world and have one hell of a good time.

—E.B. White

Our work in L&D is helping business leaders face and overcome monumental challenges and make careful and strategic moves through a fog of uncertainty. It's not for the faint of heart.

And yet, many of us chose this profession because we are, at our core, teachers. Like you, we believe that education is the key to transformation.

Like you, we believe giving people the tools and resources to help them realize and reach their potential will change the world for the better.

This matters. Your work matters.

It would be our privilege and honor to help you and your organization with any aspect of learning and development, from strategy to implementation. Please reach out to us anytime; we'd love to hear more about your challenge and discover how we can support you.

One way to connect is through our website: https://www.sweetrush.com/get-in-touch/.

Or email us at info@sweetrush.com.

And I'd love to connect with you personally— you can find me on LinkedIn at /hartdanielle. Let's talk and share ideas.

Wishing you all the best in 2023 and beyond,
Danielle Hart and the SweetRush Team

in /hartdanielle/

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Trust

is a beautiful thing.

Trust is why we get to work
on our clients' most

IMPORTANT CUSTOM
L&D PROJECTS.

And when our clients need

TEMPORARY TALENT,

the trust is there because, like them, we _do_ this work!

And when they have

LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

challenges—the trust is there because we walk the walk.

And when they see

VR & AR

coming and need a solid partner,
the trust is there to build the business case
(and incredible content).

And trust is why clients join us in pushing
the envelope and creating results that

WIN AWARDS.

So let's have one conversation.
You will feel the trust!

103 Golds
Brandon Hall
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SweetRush was bought into our success from Day 1. Incredible commitment and partnership!

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—L&D Manager, IT & Technology, 10,000+ employees

Great thought leaders willing to push, and be pushed, in new and exciting ways.

Excellent and responsive team, great innovators, inclusive leadership. All of this has made me and my team feel at home, as if SweetRush were an extension of our internal team members.

—Product Manager, Online Education, 10,000+ employees

SweetRush is a customer-focused partner that provides world-class products and services.

The SweetRush team is amazing. They are all so friendly and quick to jump on any questions or concerns. Their communication is top notch and their final product is amazing. They helped us realize our vision and produce something new and fresh our company had never seen before. I have and will recommend them for any eLearning need in the future.

—Senior L&D Manager, Automotive, 10,000+ employees

THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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L&D and Learner Experience

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How L&D is elevating human potential
in a time of rapid change

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