



# LEARNING AND SKILLS AT WORK SURVEY 2021



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## Report

# Learning and skills at work survey 2021

## Contents

Foreword from Accenture	2
Executive summary	2
Learning and development in the pandemic	5
Digital decisions	11
Back to business	18
Clarity, connection and collaboration	25
Agility and future skills	31
Evidence and evaluation	38
Conclusions and recommendations	45
Methodology	46
Notes	48

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## 1 Foreword from Accenture

This last year has been one of social, economic and digital upheaval. In many spheres of life, our world has been turned upside down. But there have also been glimmers of how we can change rapidly and moments of reflection about purpose and possibilities.

This is particularly true of the world of work, skills and learning. This research captures a snapshot of upheaval and rapid changes in learning. But it also raises questions for the future about how we continue to reinvent and reimagine learning and skills for ourselves and our organisations.

The need for learning is greater than ever. Business priorities have shifted rapidly, creating needs to flex the workforce and their skills around new work. Digital workplaces and the acceleration of cloud computing have demanded more specialist data, security and technology skills. A desire for more inclusive and meaningful experiences continues to drive needs for empathy, leadership, communication and other human skills. And probably the greatest need has been from individuals, who see personal growth as an essential part of meaningful work and careers.

In the last year, the learning professional has been in the spotlight. About a third have seen reduced budgets and resources, needing to do more with less. Almost all have had to change strategies and plans, dealing with rapidly changing organisation priorities. Rather unsurprisingly there was a dramatic swing towards the use of learning technology. However, underneath this result, there is a clear divide between those with sophisticated use of learning technology – who were more ready for remote learning and are creating more experiential and democratised experiences – versus those who have relied urgently on webinars and basic e-learning to reach people outside the classroom. Equally clear was the divide between those who had strong leadership support and those who did not value learning. Even in these difficult times, significant improvements have been made by learning professionals in the last year, but there is much more to do.

None of these things are going back to how they were before and we will face new challenges in the year ahead as we help people learn about hybrid workspaces, build more inclusive organisations, create business growth, tackle the climate emergency, grapple with new technologies and bring displaced workers back into work. Learning never stops.

**Andy Young, Managing Director, Accenture Talent & Organisation**

## 2 Executive summary

The CIPD's *Learning and skills at work survey*, in partnership with Accenture, explores organisational approaches to learning and skills to provide learning professionals and senior leaders with evidence-led recommendations to transform the learning provision within their context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought massive disruption globally, impacting not just the way people and organisations work, but also how they learn and develop the skills they need now and in the future.

Many organisations have felt the need to cut back on resources for learning, placing additional pressure on learning and development (L&D) teams who are also dealing with

the sudden and sweeping changes to learning delivery, stemming from the overnight shift to remote working for many and restrictions around in-person face-to-face learning.

However, for some organisations and their learning teams, the crisis has proved to be an opportunity: to refresh their alignment with organisational needs, to examine the enablers of collaboration and learning in their organisations, to embrace digital technology and to support employee reskilling and redeployment at a time of ongoing workforce disruption.

### **Pressure on organisational resources for L&D**

The pandemic has significantly reduced traditional L&D organisational metrics related to resourcing and investment, with around a third of organisations reporting reductions in budgets, L&D headcount and use of external consultants. Organisations who had been more severely impacted by the pandemic have had to make greater cuts to learning budgets.

### **Sudden changes and no going back**

Three-quarters of organisations had to change their L&D strategy and resources in response to the pandemic. There is a high level of uncertainty about what the future holds. For many organisations there is no going back: just 18% think that their learning strategy, investment and resourcing will go back to what it was before the pandemic began.

### **Rush towards digital delivery but use of experience-rich tech still low**

With social distancing restrictions and the widespread move to remote and homeworking, there has been a seismic shift to digital learning as in-person L&D has been scaled back or halted. Last year just 36% of organisations reported using webinars or virtual classrooms – this figure now stands at 51%. However, take-up of emerging technologies, which have the potential to make learning both more engaging and effective, remains low: the proportion using mobile apps, chatbots, VR and AR animations or games is largely unchanged. This implies that organisations have not necessarily thought through how to digitalise learning in a blended way to get the best out of different delivery methods.

### **Greater sophistication yielding greater engagement and demand**

The analysis shows that organisations that adopt a more sophisticated approach to technology create a virtuous circle, generating increased appetite for learning, while being more likely to have a supportive learning environment in place. However, they are also more likely to report barriers to delivery.

### **Increased opportunities to better align with organisational need**

If learning is to positively impact business performance, it must get much closer to the business and there needs to be greater clarity in the learning team about business drivers. While the pandemic may have reduced L&D resources, it has created increased opportunities to align better with business need. Compared with last year, more organisations report that learning is valued by senior leaders; a greater proportion say their learning strategy is aligned with business priorities and the vast majority report that they are clear about the way learning adds value in their organisation.

### **Relationships and human connectivity crucial**

The findings highlight large falls in the majority of formal and more traditional forms of learning interventions. Yet, the paradox is that even though the connections from traditional, venue-based learning have been reduced, the switch to digital has in some cases improved the way individuals support each other – many say they have never been more connected. For instance, the survey found that compared with last year, there has been a significant upswing in the proportion of organisations saying they develop and maintain a climate of trust, as well as a rise in those that say employees are supporting each other to learn.

### **Visibility of skills gaps and how to tackle them are key to success**

The evolving world of work and the catalyst of the pandemic have driven up the demand for workforce agility and the need for reskilling and redeployment. Since last year, a greater proportion of organisations say they have assessed:

- the impact of automation and how to redeploy employees affected (51%)
- how roles are changing and how to reskill to meet these needs (64%).

Organisations are also more confident about their ability to address current skills gaps, with 72% reporting that they are able to effectively tackle skills gaps.

### **Are learning professionals equipped to meet skills agenda?**

The learning function itself needs to be agile and future-focused if it is to support organisational agility and meet future skills needs. However, it appears that more work is needed in this area. The survey found that while more organisations had online facilitator roles in place, only a minority had design roles, such as learning technologist/product owner (11%), digital asset creator (7%) and instructional designers (11%).

### **Desire to demonstrate impact hampered by barriers to evaluation**

Measuring the impact, transfer and engagement of L&D activities can't simply be done by an end-of-course questionnaire or post-training survey. Instead, evidence needs to permeate and inform every step of the decision-making process. Since last year, there has been a slight rise in the proportion of organisations (76% vs 70%) evaluating the impact of their L&D initiatives in some way. However, only a small minority are evaluating the wider impact on the business or society, or assessing the behaviour change of participants by measuring the transfer of learning into the workplace. Barriers to evaluation have intensified, particularly due to pressure from other business priorities, likely as a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

### **Majority do not use evidence to inform programme design**

Looking at the approach to applying evidence shows that the most common way L&D professionals add value through learning interventions is through using continuous feedback (38%). Only a third say they are proactive in identifying the performance issue before recommending a solution, and only a quarter design and make recommendations using evidence-informed principles to address the performance issue.

### **Recommendations**

Drawing on the findings and their implications, we make the following practice recommendations:

**Build back better:** Now is the time for senior leaders and L&D professionals to reflect on what has worked well in the past year, and what can be adapted to ensure success in the changing world of work. Practitioners should reflect on lessons learned through the COVID-19 pandemic. With rapid changes to learning delivery and strategy, consider what has worked well and what could be improved upon.

**Embrace digital innovation:** While investment in learning has decreased this year, conversely, spend on learning technology has increased. Successful approaches start with defining your learning technology strategy in line with your learning strategy. Target your investment and be clear on the business case. Start small, pilot and experiment before scaling up.

**Co-create organisational value:** The past year created a unique climate where often siloed functions are now working together to help the organisation respond rapidly to change. This has created a significant opportunity for business leaders and learning leaders to collaborate in solving critical business challenges.

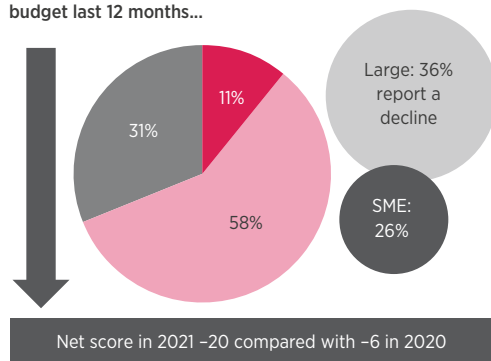
**Harness the wider learning environment:** Relationships and human connectivity are even more crucial in the digital era. To maintain a sense of connection we must be purposeful in building relationships and connections across the whole organisation. At an organisation level, this means having a clear and common agreement about the role of the line manager in the L&D provision, at team level making connections with existing knowledge and collaborating with peers to drive performance, and on an individual level supporting and encouraging them to apply their learning.

**Be future-focused:** Addressing future skills needs/reskilling is high on the agenda but often organisations lack clarity over the skills to target and how to agilely deliver to ever evolving skills needs. L&D practitioners need to recognise that they cannot go on this journey alone; they should: understand the skills and capabilities that will be required in the future and the transition states along that journey; make a plan to build the future skills, considering hiring, reskilling and redeployment; encourage continual learning and create the clear learning pathways and career choices towards future skills your people and your organisation need.

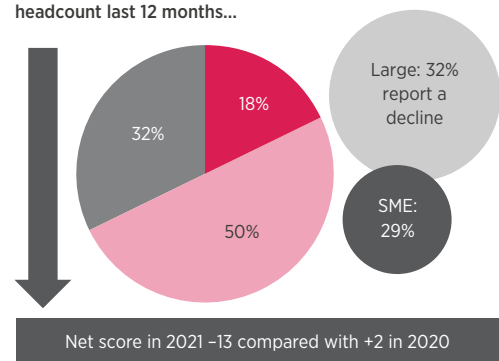
**Make evidence-based decisions:** Effective learning requires evidence-gathering to underpin decisions in design and delivery. Impactful learning journeys are underpinned by evidence from start to finish. Learner practitioners should: define the desired performance outcome and work back; engage key stakeholders; gather and report both qualitative (numbers) and quantitative (narrative) evidence.

### 3 Learning and development in the pandemic

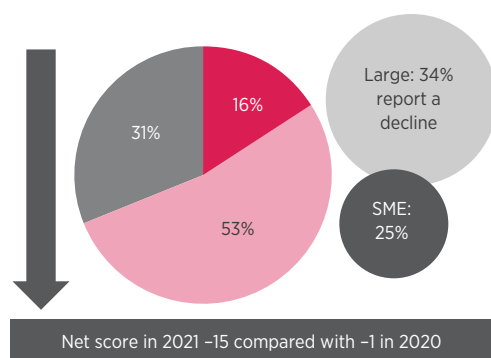
Change in learning and development budget last 12 months...



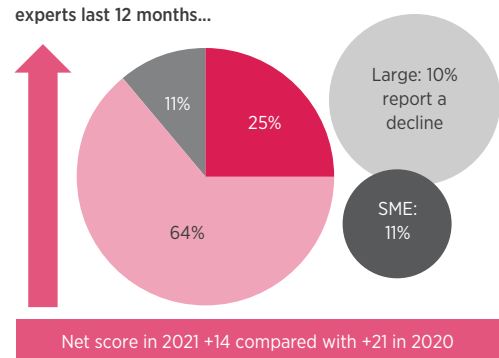
Change in learning and development headcount last 12 months...



Change in use of external suppliers last 12 months...



Change in use of internal subject-matter experts last 12 months...



■ Increased    ■ Stayed the same    ■ Decreased

Net score - measures the difference between the proportion reporting an increase and those reporting a decrease

## At a glance: learning and development during the pandemic

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced significant metrics of organisational learning and development for about a third of participants, with higher declines in larger firms.

- 31% reported that their L&D budget has decreased in the last 12 months.
- 32% reported that their L&D headcount has declined.
- 31% reported that their use of external suppliers and consultants has fallen.

However, it should be noted that the majority of organisations saw stability in budgets and a smaller group saw increases in funding and resources.

### Introduction and context

Last year was a demanding one for organisations and people professionals alike. Particularly within learning and development (L&D), the overnight shift to remote working during the pandemic resulted in sudden and sweeping changes to how L&D teams support organisational learning.<sup>1</sup> There is a high probability that there will be no return to business-as-usual post-crisis; the pandemic has likely changed for good the distribution of work between the regular workplace and home for many workers. Recent CIPD research found that some 40% of employers said they expect more than half their workforce to work regularly from home after the pandemic ends.<sup>2</sup>

As well as having to grapple with new forms of delivery, we also know that learning and development often falls down the priority list in turbulent times. The CIPD's People Profession Survey 2020 showed that learning is no longer receiving immediate attention within businesses, with L&D taking a backseat for many during the pandemic. Indeed, our survey results bear this out, with the disruption caused by the pandemic reducing significant metrics of organisational L&D.

### Organisational response to the pandemic

#### High-level response

Our survey was conducted between 13 January and 4 February 2021, around ten months after the start of the pandemic. While the resulting disruption was widespread, it has not affected organisations equally. Organisations of different sizes in different sectors have faced different issues: some have had to place people on furlough (46%), others make redundancies (28%), and many have had to redeploy employees (41%).

#### Headcount and investment

The differing impact of the pandemic on organisations was also reflected in an unequal impact on resources and investment for organisational learning, with those who have been more severely affected experiencing greater cutbacks.

As Table 1 sets out, the hardest hit experienced the biggest cut to L&D resourcing, with organisations who have had to make redundancies or use the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) more likely to see a decline in budget, use of suppliers and headcount.



**Table 1: Headcount, investing and external support: comparing those who have had to make redundancies and those using furlough (%)**

	Organisations who...	Furloughed employees using JRS	Made redundancies	Did not use JRS	Did not make redundancies
<b>Budget</b>	% reporting decline	38%	48%	24%	19%
	<b>Net score</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-41</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>Headcount</b>	% reporting decline	44%	56%	21%	16%
	<b>Net score</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>-44</b>	<b>+3</b>	<b>+8</b>
<b>Use of external consultants</b>	% reporting decline	38%	40%	27%	27%
	<b>Net score</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-25</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-10</b>

Net score – measures the difference between the proportion reporting an increase and those reporting a decrease

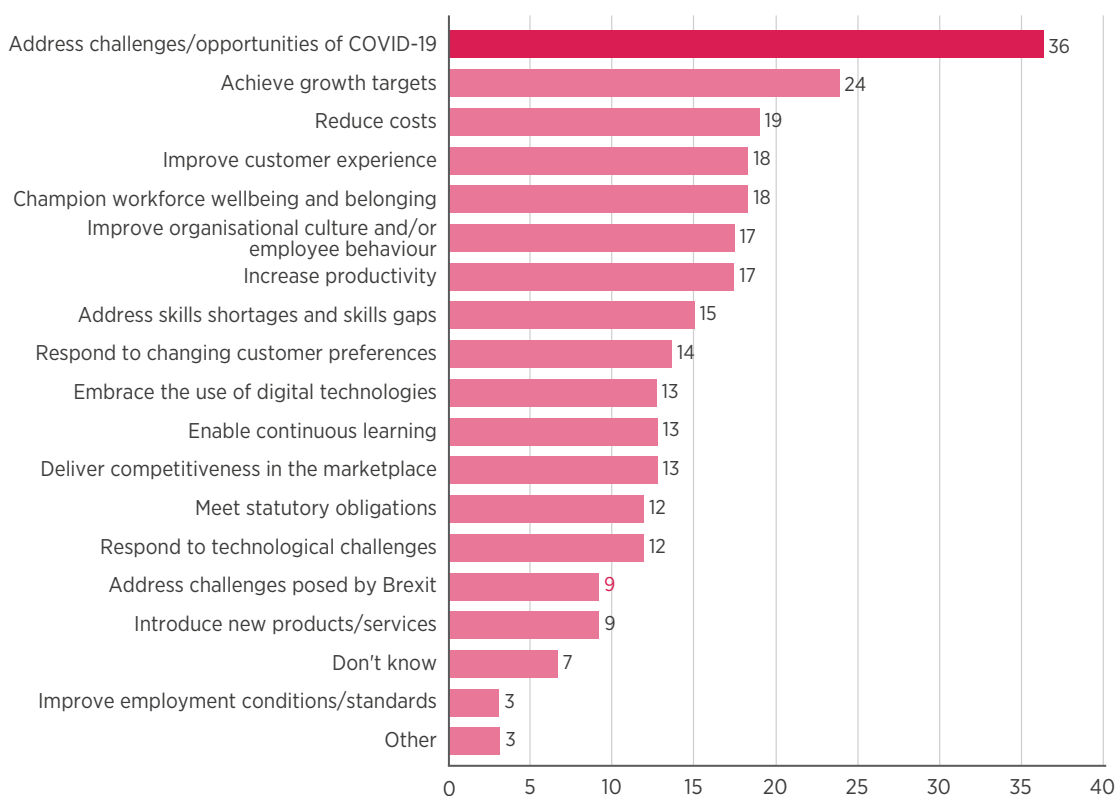
Base: used furlough: 344; not used furlough: 345; made redundancies: 242; not made redundancies: 380.

### Changing people and organisational priorities

Dealing with the pandemic has pushed other organisational and people priorities down the rankings. However, aspects requiring L&D expertise, such as addressing skills gaps and developing managers and leaders, still remain high in terms of organisational priorities.

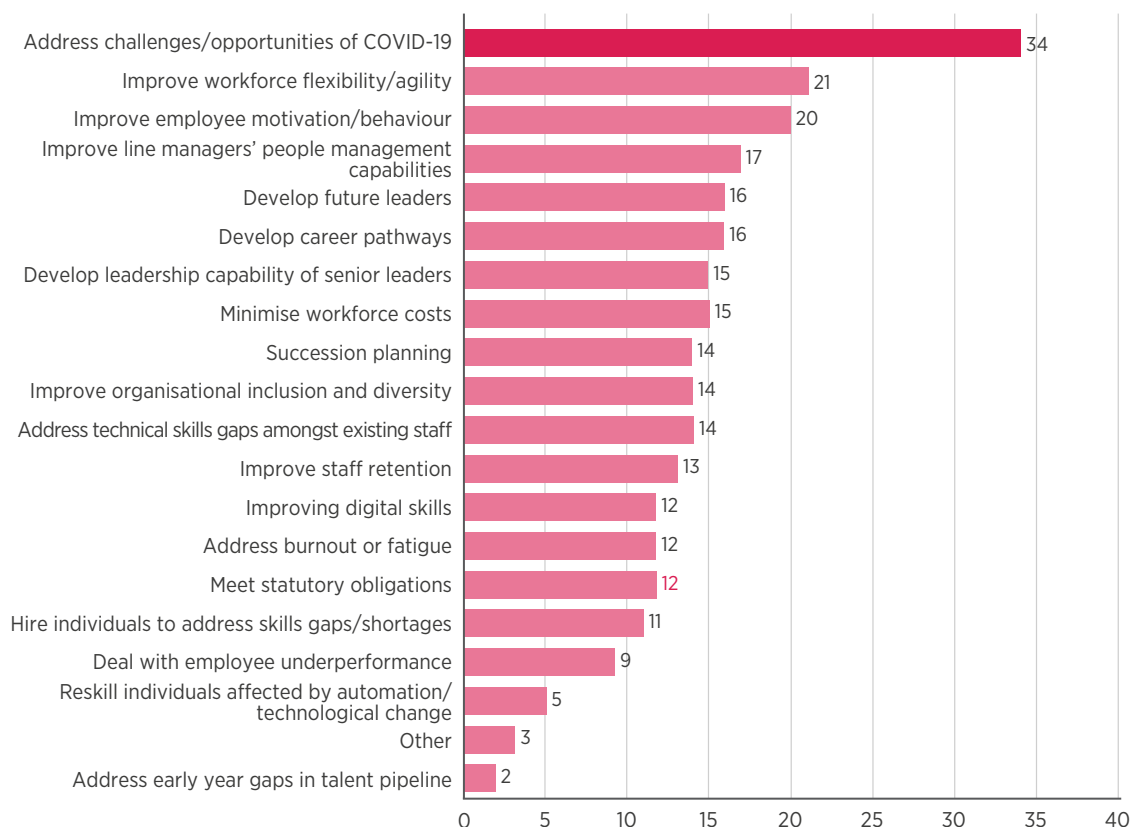
Addressing the challenges and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic was the most identified top three organisational (Figure 1) and people (Figure 2) priority by respondents in our survey. Organisations that have been more severely affected by the pandemic (as measured by whether they have had to furlough employees) were more likely to select this as a top priority: 40% of organisations who had to furlough employees selected it as a top three organisational and top three people priority compared with figures of 33% and 29% of organisations who had not had to furlough employees.

**Figure 1: What are the top three priorities for your organisation for the next 12 months? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

Figure 2: What are the top three ‘people’ priorities for your organisation in the next 12 months? (%)



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

### What impacts priorities?

#### Headline differences in approaches to organisational learning

To help explore differences in organisational approaches to learning and to identify what we can learn from each other, we segment the responses throughout the analysis according to where the learning accountability sits within the organisation:

- **Focused** – accountability for L&D sits within a specialist L&D function within HR (87% large businesses, 72% private sector).
- **Generalist** – organisations have no specialist L&D function, accountability for L&D sits in a general HR function, with learning part of general HR activities (54% SMEs, 84% private sector).
- **L&D in line of business** – learning accountability is structurally positioned outside of HR and closer to operations, with L&D part of operational delivery within a business function (approximately half are SMEs and half large businesses).
- **No L&D function** – organisations have no L&D function. Learning accountability sits with senior leaders and/or line managers (84% SMEs, 83% private sector).

Demographics	Size		Sector		
	SMEs	Large	Private	Public	Voluntary
<b>Focused</b>	13%	87%	72%	22%	6%
<b>Generalist</b>	54%	46%	84%	9%	8%
<b>In line of business</b>	48%	52%	71%	23%	6%
<b>No L&amp;D function</b>	84%	16%	83%	7%	10%

As mentioned, while the pandemic might be the top priority for all organisations, regardless of where accountability for learning sits, the second and third priorities of learning leaders are not always the same as business leaders:

- Respondents with L&D in the line of business or with no L&D function were slightly more likely to report that responding to the pandemic is a key organisational priority (figures of 38% and 42% respectively).
- Those with focused L&D in HR were more likely to rate wellbeing and culture (27%) as an organisational priority compared with those in the line of business (17%), who were more likely to be focusing on improving customer experience (25%) and digital technology (25%) (figures for focused L&D stood at 19% and 16% respectively).
- Those with no L&D function were more likely to be focusing on achieving growth rates (31% compared with 24% of all respondents) and increasing productivity (23% compared with 17% overall).

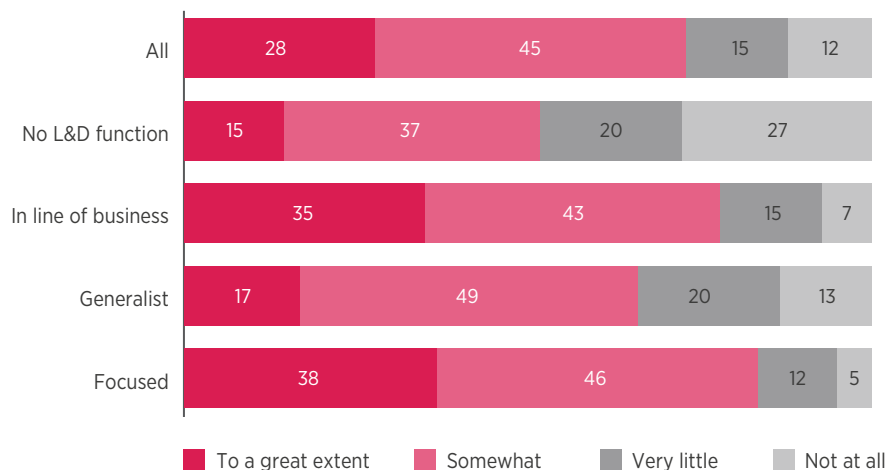
### Shifting strategy and resourcing priorities

Organisations have had to rapidly accelerate the adoption of digital learning solutions to support the shift to remote working (see **Digital decisions**). While there is still a high level of uncertainty about what the future holds for the world of work generally and for L&D in particular, for many organisations, there is no going back.

Figures 3 and 4 show that overall, 28% of organisations had to change their L&D strategy to a great extent and a further 45% reported that it changed somewhat. While there is still a considerable level of uncertainty, only in one in five expect learning strategy, investment and resourcing to return to what it was before the pandemic.

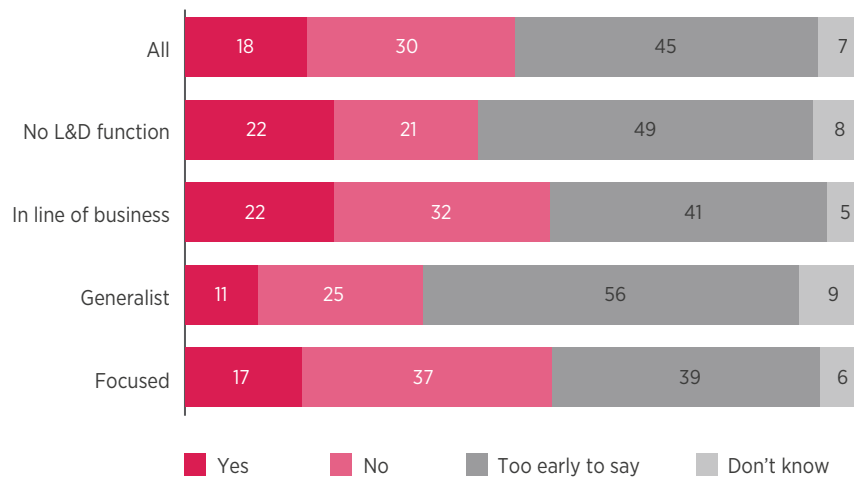
Those organisations with dedicated L&D professionals (in organisation and those in a specialist function in HR) were most likely to say that their learning strategy has changed significantly, and they were also more likely report that it will not return to the way it was before (37% compared with 30% overall). This implies that those with dedicated experts in L&D have been more readily able to adapt to disruption and workforce reorganisation: analysis presented in **Digital decisions** shows that they have been better able to harness technology to support learning. However, there is still more for learning professionals to do to tap into wider workforce learning and collaboration (see **Clarity, connection and collaboration**).

**Figure 3: To what extent, if any, has your L&D strategy changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219; focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

**Figure 4: Looking forward, do you think that your learning strategy, investment and resourcing will go back to what it was before the pandemic began? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219; focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

### Case study: Co-op – Responding to the pandemic

**Challenge:** For Co-op, the biggest initial disruption from the pandemic was panic-buying followed by increased demand as people turned to local shops during travel restrictions. The crisis fuelled a rapid increase in their delivery and digital offers while their Funeralcare service also faced disruption. All of this meant that they had to grow their workforce rapidly, filling 5,000 vacancies to meet demand, as well as any gaps created by employees needing to shield or isolate, all while ensuring that colleagues are kept safe.

**Solution:** The L&D team adapted their approach quickly to onboard new colleagues. Working with the business, they targeted their approach to e-learning, focusing on providing colleagues with appropriate training ‘just-in-time’. For its Funeralcare business, it meant working closely with the business to derive the right training offer that could bring new colleagues up to speed, many of whom had never worked in the sector before. The team was able to design and develop a core set of e-learning modules within two weeks to set people up for success and enable their deployment into the business.

The challenge gave the L&D team the impetus to break through technology-related barriers and to challenge the assumption that face-to-face is the gold standard. The team was able to demonstrate the benefits of virtual learning, for example, as it reconfigured the Funeralcare induction to increase the speed to competence and deliver cost savings such as reduced travel and accommodation costs.

### Practical implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on L&D, not least in the acceleration of digital learning. For organisations hit hardest by the pandemic, reduction in learning budgets and L&D headcounts has also created challenges for workplace learning. But, our research shows that L&D professionals have risen to the challenge, with many adapting their learning strategies. And, with many organisations redeploying staff and freezing recruitment activity, L&D has never been more important.

With only one in five believing their learning strategy will return to what it was before the pandemic, now is the time for L&D professionals to reflect on what has worked well in the past year, and what can be adapted to ensure success in the changing world of work.

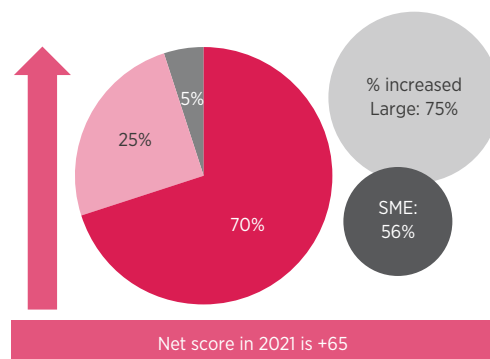
L&D professionals should:

- Reflect on lessons learned through the COVID-19 pandemic. With rapid changes to learning delivery and strategy, what has worked well and what could be improved upon?
- Collaborate with business leaders and line managers to align learning strategy to changing people and business priorities; for example, our research finds that improving line manager capability is a top people priority for businesses.
- Showcase the value that L&D can bring as we navigate the changing world of work; learning, development and upskilling are key tools for organisational success in the coming years.

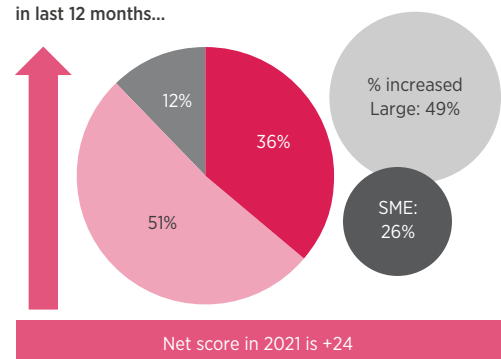
Mel Green, Research Adviser, CIPD

## 4 Digital decisions

Use of digital solutions in last 12 months...

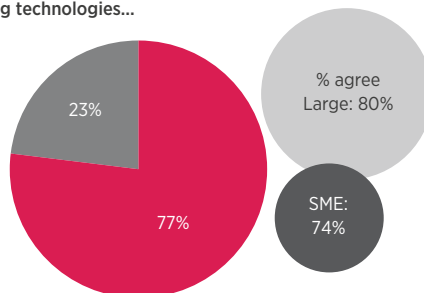


Investment in learning technologies in last 12 months...

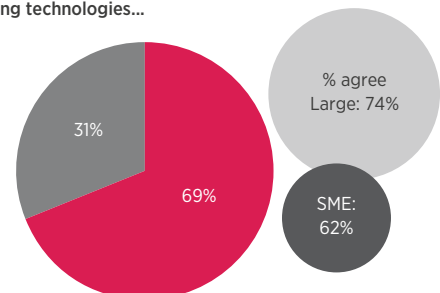


■ Increased ■ Stayed the same ■ Decreased

We are successfully using learning technologies...



We are innovating in our use of learning technologies...



■ Agree ■ Disagree

### At a glance: digital response to change

While budget and resources may have dropped (see [Learning and development in the pandemic](#)), investment in technology to support learning has not:

- 70% report that their use of digital learning solutions has increased over the last 12 months.
- 36% reported an increase in investment in learning technologies.
- The vast majority of organisations agree or strongly agree that they are successfully using learning technologies (77%) and are innovating in their use of learning technologies (69%).

Larger organisations have more need, better access to and more success with learning technology.

### Introduction

With social distancing restrictions and the widespread move to homeworking, there has been a seismic shift to digital learning as in-person L&D has been scaled back or halted.

Yet, even last year's survey,<sup>3</sup> conducted just before the pandemic, raised important concerns about the preparedness of organisations to deliver such a shift. Our report showed that while technology-enabled delivery had increased in importance, the adoption of more emergent technologies to support the delivery any time, any place, any way was sluggish: for instance, mobile applications were only being used by a very small proportion of organisations.

As well as the types of technology being used, the tactics and strategies behind implementation also need consideration. Though further CIPD research found that quality digital learning can be just as effective as in-person or classroom learning,<sup>4</sup> adopting technology to support learning must be framed within an overall learning philosophy. Thought must be given to which types of learning are best suited to digital platforms rather than simply transferring all face-to-face content online 'as is'.

### Digital response to change for learning and skills

#### Rapid response with familiar tools

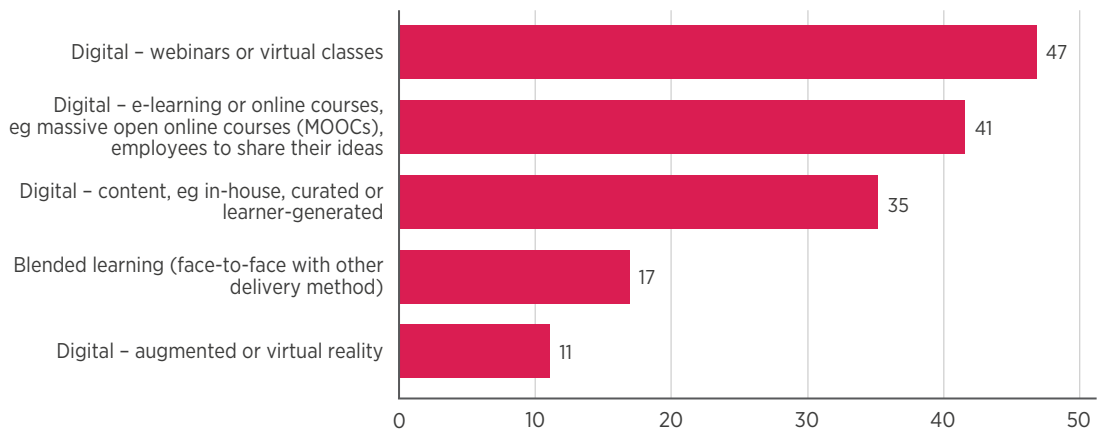
In the face of the massive shift to homeworking for many organisations and the drop in in-person learning delivery due to lockdown measures, many are turning instead to digital solutions. Many organisations have responded rapidly by adapting the technology they readily had at their disposal (webinars, online courses).

Almost half (47%) of organisations reported that they had arranged or funded digital webinars or virtual classrooms in the last 12 months; 41% had providing digital e-learning or online courses; 35% had used digital content; 17% had offered blended learning opportunities; and just 11% had used augmented or virtual reality.

*Don't be blinded by the technology and the jargon. The people – the learners, instructors, corporate L&D leaders, and senior management – are still key, despite the technology. In particular, support and train the people designing and delivering the training – train the trainers!*<sup>5</sup>

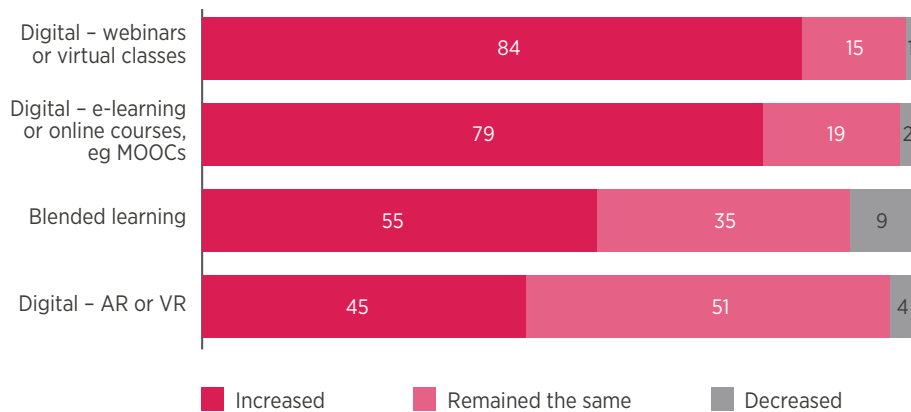
Where technology-enabled learning has been adopted, its use is increasing dramatically. Figure 6 shows how the pattern of use has shifted over the last two to three years. This shows the growing importance of webinars/virtual classrooms and e-learning in organisations that have adopted these learning methods.

**Figure 5: Which of the following types of learning and development has your organisation arranged or funded for employees in the past 12 months? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

**Figure 6: Over the last two to three years, has your use of these types of learning and development increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (%)**



Base: all respondents who have used the type of learning and development: digital webinars or virtual classroom: 537; digital – e-learning or online course: 466; blended learning: 207; digital – AR or VR: 406.

### Lower priority for richer experience

Unsurprisingly the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a revolution in the proportion of organisations adopting technology to support learning and collaboration, and a drop in the proportion of organisations not using any form of technology.

Figure 7 demonstrates that, compared with 2020, there have been several big shifts in how organisations are using technology to support learning and collaboration:

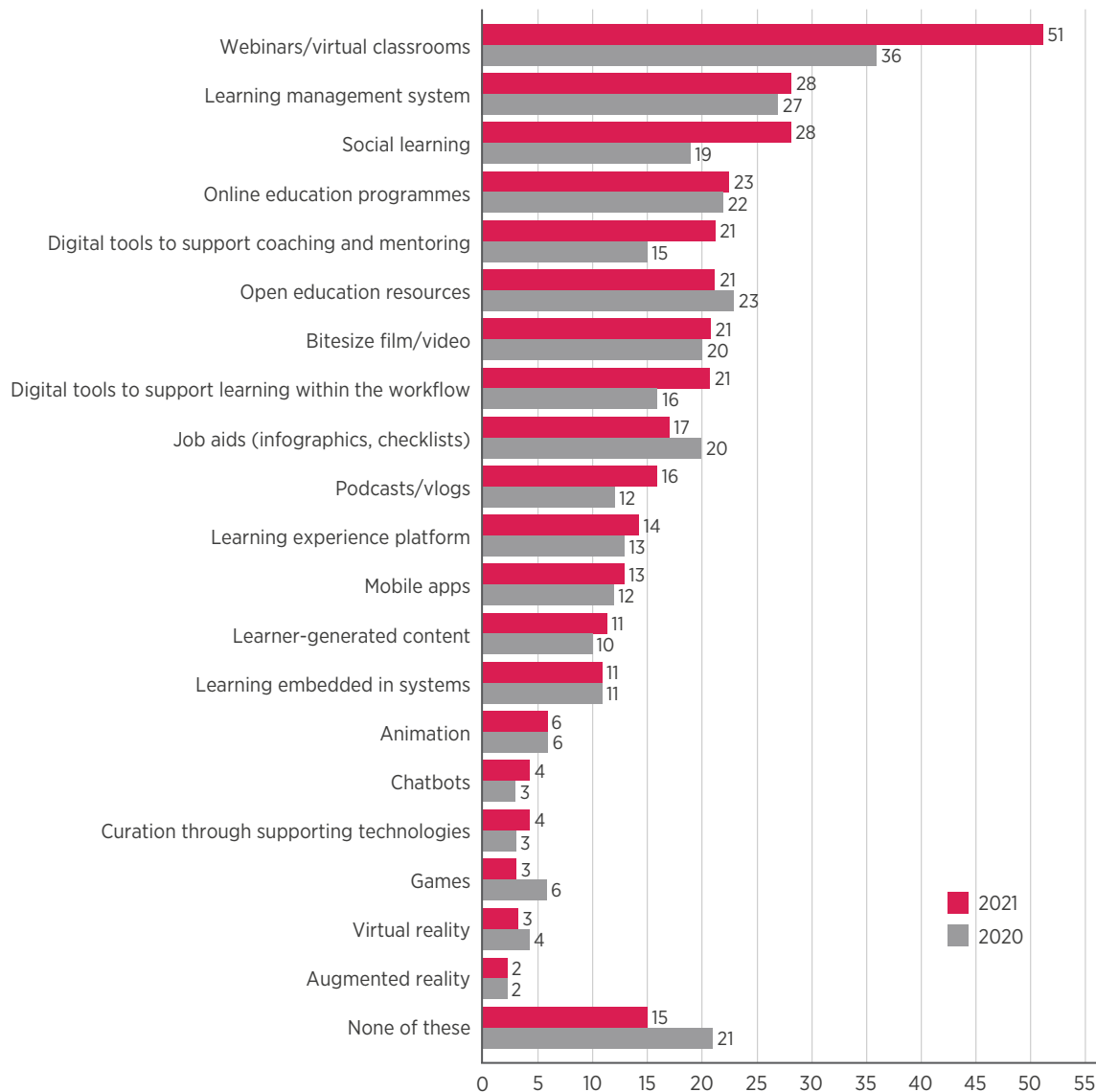
- In 2020 just 36% of organisations reported using webinars or virtual classrooms; this now stands at over half (51%).
- Social learning is increasingly used by organisations: 28% report using social learning, up from just 19% last year.
- Digital tools to support coaching and mentoring (21% up from 15%) and learning within the flow of work have also increased (21% up from 16%).
- There has been a shift down in the number of organisations not using any form of technology to support content delivery and collaboration, from 21% in 2020 to just 15% in 2021.

However, the use of technologies that enable learning to be available anytime and accessible anywhere, as well as to be more engaging and effective, has largely remained unchanged:

- The figure for use of mobile apps stood at just 12% in 2020; this remains largely unchanged (13%).
- Virtual (3%) and augmented (2%) reality is similarly only used by a tiny minority of organisations (in 2020 these figures stood at 4% and 2% respectively).
- The proportion using technology and resources such as chatbots, animations or games also remains largely unchanged.

Given some of the learning challenges currently presenting themselves – for instance, creating empathy and awareness of bias with diverse customers and colleagues – this is a missed opportunity to generate more immersed or interactive experiences that would suit the learning need.

**Figure 7: Which digital technologies is your organisation currently using to support content delivery and collaboration within your workforce? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.



### Lessons of sophisticated technology users

To provide additional insight, the learning and skills strategies of different types of technology adopters were grouped into three categories based on the number, range, and types of technologies they were using to support learning and collaboration:

- **Basic users** – those using simple content/administration tools (mean tools used – 1.7).
- **Content push users** – those using primarily content tools (mean tools used – 4.7).
- **Sophisticated users** – those using more non-content-related tools (mean tools used – 8.4).

The analysis shows that those organisations that ventured beyond the familiar, and incorporated a more sophisticated approach to technology, have reaped rewards such as increased appetite for learning and the reinforcement of a supportive culture that promotes collaboration. While those who have yet to explore these might do well to consider application in their own contexts, they should also be aware that barriers like time for learning still remain and should be considered as they review their L&D strategies.

**Table 2: Characteristics of different types of technology adopters (%)**

	SMEs	Large	Private	Public	Voluntary	All
<b>Basic</b>	51	38	38	41	45	43
<b>Content push</b>	18	30	30	34	26	25
<b>Sophisticated</b>	7	22	22	17	19	16
<b>No tech tool</b>	24	10	10	8	10	16

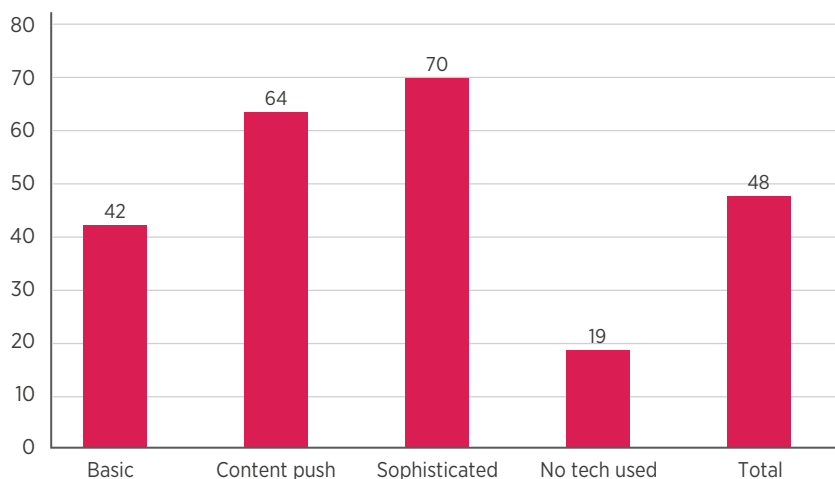
Base: all: 1,137; basic: 490; content push: 284; sophisticated: 180; no tech used: 182.

### Digital exposure increases digital demand

Figures 8 and 9 highlight the proportion of organisations that report increased demand for digital learning from end users (Figure 8) and senior leaders (Figure 9). The pattern is clear: organisations that adopt a more sophisticated approach to technology-enabled learning have a greater demand for digital learning:

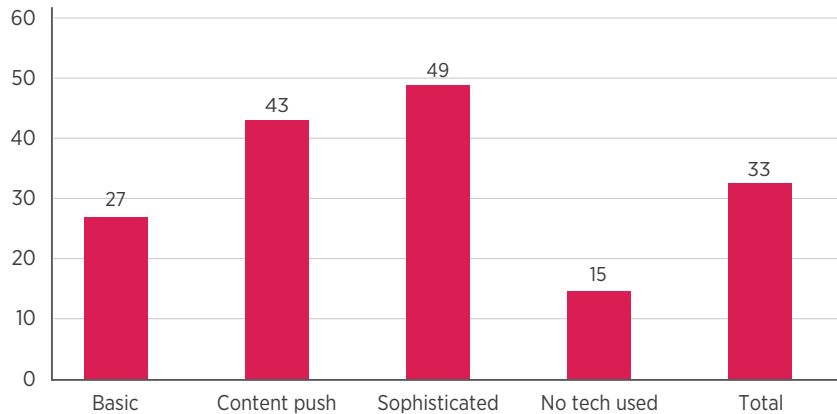
- increased demand from end users – basic users (42%); content push (64%); sophisticated (70%)
- increased digital demand from senior leaders – basic users (27%); content push (43%); sophisticated (49%).

**Figure 8: Organisations with increased user demand for digital learning by technology approach (%)**



Base: basic: 490; content push: 284; sophisticated: 180; no tech used: 182.

**Figure 9: Organisations with increased leader demand for digital learning by technology approach (%)**

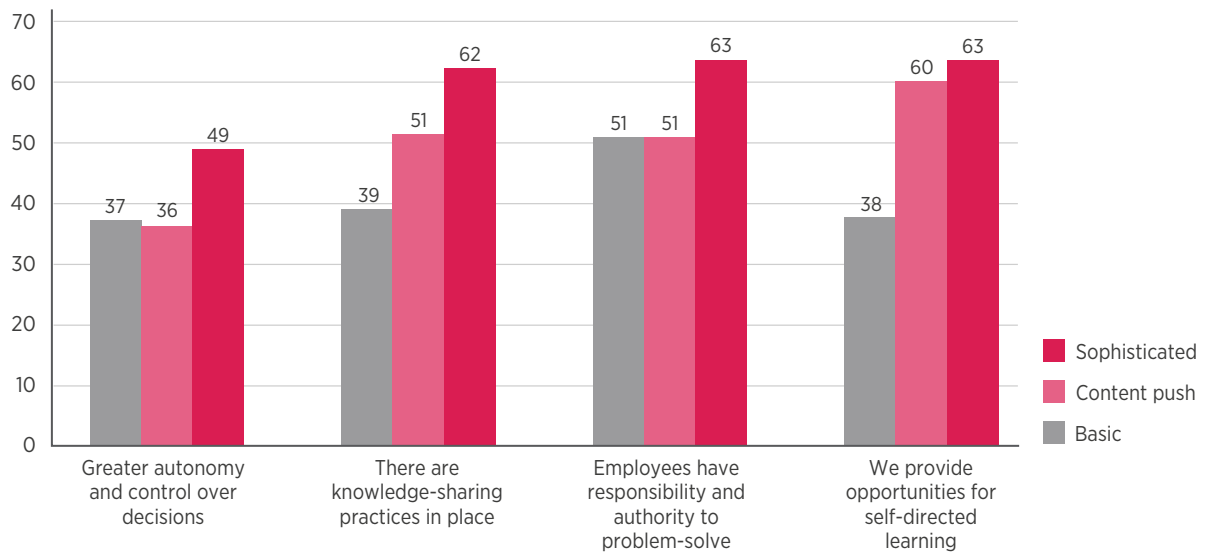


Base: basic: 490; content push: 284; sophisticated: 180; no tech used: 182.

**Create supportive environments for empowered workers**

Learning, whether digitally enabled or not, needs to take place in a supportive environment in which employees are empowered to put their learning into practice. Encouragingly, organisations that adopt a more sophisticated approach to technology-enabled learning are more likely to have in place the wider workforce practices that support employees to use and develop their skills further (for more on the wider learning environment, see **Clarity, connection and collaboration**). Figure 10 shows that sophisticated technology adopters are more likely to report that their organisation offers opportunities for self-directed learning, autonomy and opportunities to problem-solve, and that there are practices in place that support employees to share ideas. This democratisation of learning is important as new skilling demands accelerate and become more continual.

**Figure 10: Which of the following statements, if any, describe the prevalent characteristics of your organisation? (%)**



Base: basic: 490; content push: 284; sophisticated: 180.

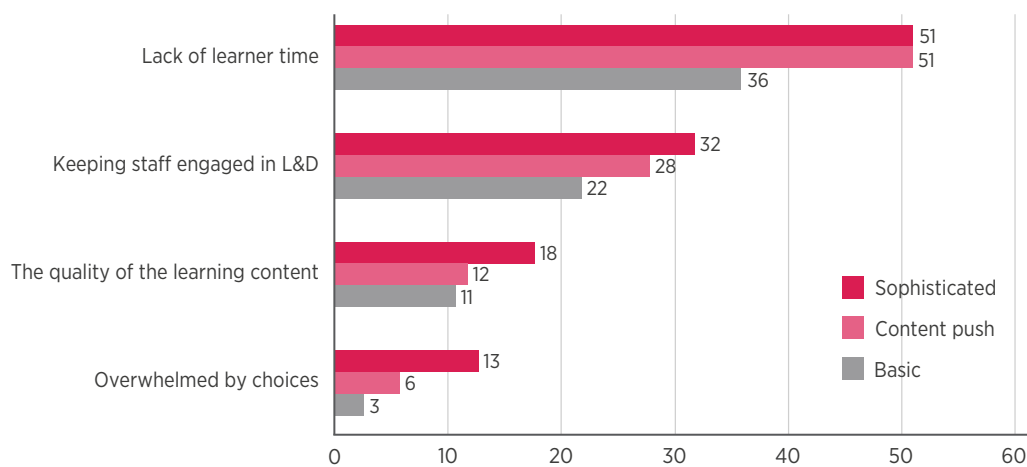
**Digital barriers**

It is clear from the survey results that technology is not a panacea; in fact, organisations that adopt a more sophisticated approach to learning technology expect more in terms of outcomes, and as a result they are more likely to report barriers to learning delivery. They

are more likely to be concerned about lack of time (51%) and learner engagement (32%) and are more likely to identify delivery challenges around choice (13%) and quality of content (18%), compared with basic users.

Often heralded as a way to free up valuable time and better engage learners through more personalised and interactive content, digital technologies alone will not overcome barriers such as lack of time to access learning or learner engagement.<sup>6</sup> While high-performing organisations are more likely to embrace new tools and technologies, it is the strategy and tactics behind their implementation that directly link back to results, not the tools themselves.<sup>7</sup> Practitioners should be clear on the purpose of technology and implement initiatives that can address learner barriers to achieve success with learning technology. As much time should be spent on the adoption and culture of learning as on the learning technology itself.

**Figure 11: Selected barriers to learning delivery by technology users (%)**



Base: basic: 490; content push: 284; sophisticated: 180.

### Case study: Pepper Group – Digital readiness

**Challenge:** Pepper Group faced a four-fold challenge: to rapidly transition all employees to remote working in a way that was compliant with regulatory requirements; getting colleagues up to speed quickly on the new mortgage payment holiday rules; managing the exponential increase in customer calls; and critically, supporting their people’s wellbeing at a time of national crisis.

**Solution:** The team acted fast to conceive, design, test and launch a new digital wellbeing hub in just three weeks. The hub served as a one-stop shop for news and information to inform and equip employees and support their physical and mental wellbeing. The team also focused on enabling employee voice through a weekly pulse survey that gave instant insights to help make improvements. A weekly online check-in was also set up to ensure mental wellbeing, helping managers proactively pinpoint individuals in need of support and guiding them to do so in a targeted, effective way, at the right time.

The initiative provided personalised and targeted support, making it relevant to individuals. The team’s proactive strategy allowed them to flex and make sense of complexity. By anchoring its approach on the CIPD’s [Profession Map](#), Pepper Group had a steady point of reference to guide the development of initiatives and also litmus-test new ideas.

### Practical implications

Learning can be transformed using technology. It can create better ways to learn, to explore and collaborate. For most people in the UK this is now the primary way we learn outside work, from fixing something using YouTube videos to nano-degrees from leading global universities. For those organisations that were already mature in digital learning, the pandemic has proven and accelerated their model. For others who had less digital fluency, they had to move quickly to enable remote learning quickly. While investment in learning overall has decreased this year, conversely, spend on learning technology has increased.

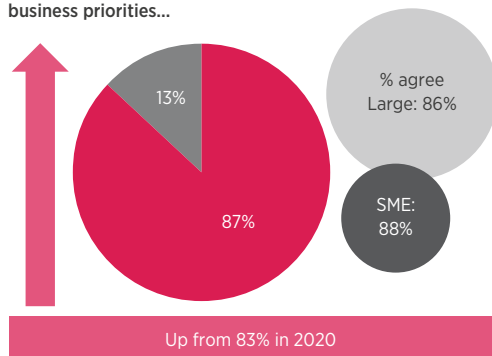
We expect this trend to continue. We are seeing a small but rapidly growing use of more advanced learning technologies, such as simulations, games or virtual/extended reality, which can create safe spaces for learning new behaviours or handling difficult situations. We also expect the continued curation of learning paths that blend internal content with external 'best in class' platforms, especially in the development of scarce skills around digital, data and cybersecurity.

As we move into hybrid workspaces and the next wave of the digital economy, what are the learning technologies that will make a difference for your learners and your organisation? We would recommend you connect these into your learning strategy and spend wisely (selecting the 'right tools for the job'). Learning practitioners can confidently use the changes of the last year as a springboard to experiment and try something new.

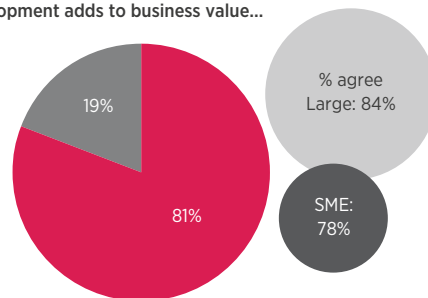
Andy Young, Managing Director, Accenture Talent & Organisation

## 5 Back to business

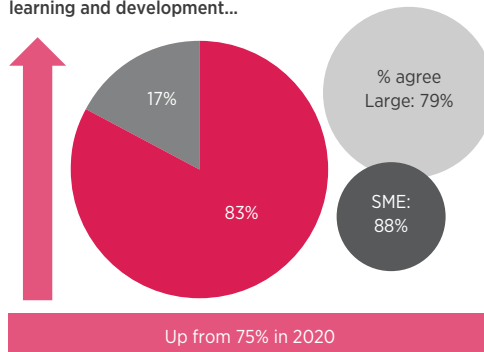
Our learning strategy is aligned with business priorities...



We are clear about the way learning and development adds to business value...



Leaders in my organisation value staff learning and development...



Agree  
Disagree

Back to business

**At a glance: revisiting organisational alignment**

While the COVID-19 pandemic may have reduced L&D resources, it has also created increased opportunities to align better with business need. Compared with 2020:

- More organisations report that learning is valued by senior leaders: 83% either agree or strongly agree, up from 75% last year.
- A slightly greater proportion of respondents report that their learning strategy is aligned with business priorities: 87% agree or strongly agree compared with 83% last year.
- 87% report that they are clear about the way learning adds value in their organisation (no 2020 comparison available).

**Introduction and context**

If learning is to positively impact business performance, it must get much closer to the business and there needs to be greater clarity in the learning team about business drivers. A feature of a high-performing organisation is effective translation of organisational strategy into a persuasive people strategy. In such organisations, L&D practitioners are confident and able to understand business priorities and create learning solutions to address those needs.<sup>8</sup>

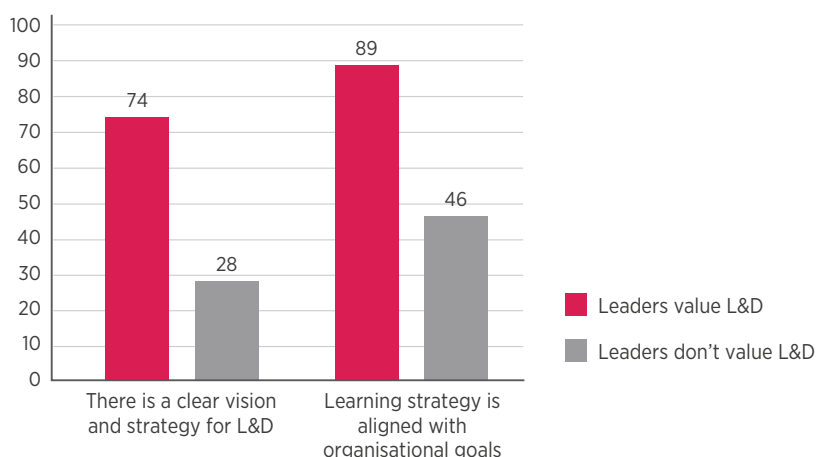
Our annual snapshot of the state of play of the people profession<sup>9</sup> shows that there is still some way to go to address the disconnect between integrating people strategy with wider business outcomes. Senior leaders, outside of the profession, are calling for more collaboration to ensure that people strategies achieve business goals; this provides an opportunity to act and position the profession as a key stakeholder to influencing business strategy.<sup>10</sup>

In the face of declining budgets but increased demands, what can organisations and L&D functions focus on with respect to their strategy? We have already discussed digital adoption, but a further critical area indicated by our research is in relation to closer alignment with business needs and gaining leadership buy-in.

**Virtuous circle of value and partnership**

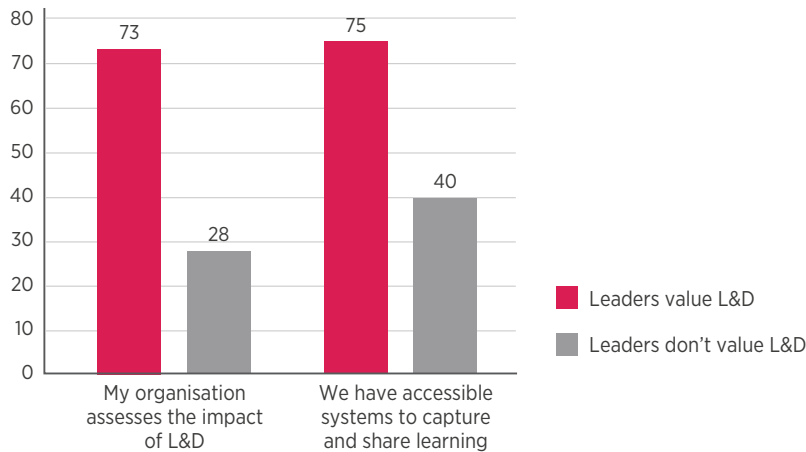
Where there is alignment and leadership support, learning is not only much more valued but more able to return value (Figure 12). Organisations where senior leaders value employee learning and development are much more likely to have systems in place to capture and assess impact and communicate value (Figure 13). When leaders value employee L&D, we see environments where line managers get involved in staff development and learning transfer, and employees themselves learn more from one another and engage in their own development (Figure 14).

**Figure 12: Value and vision and alignment (%)**



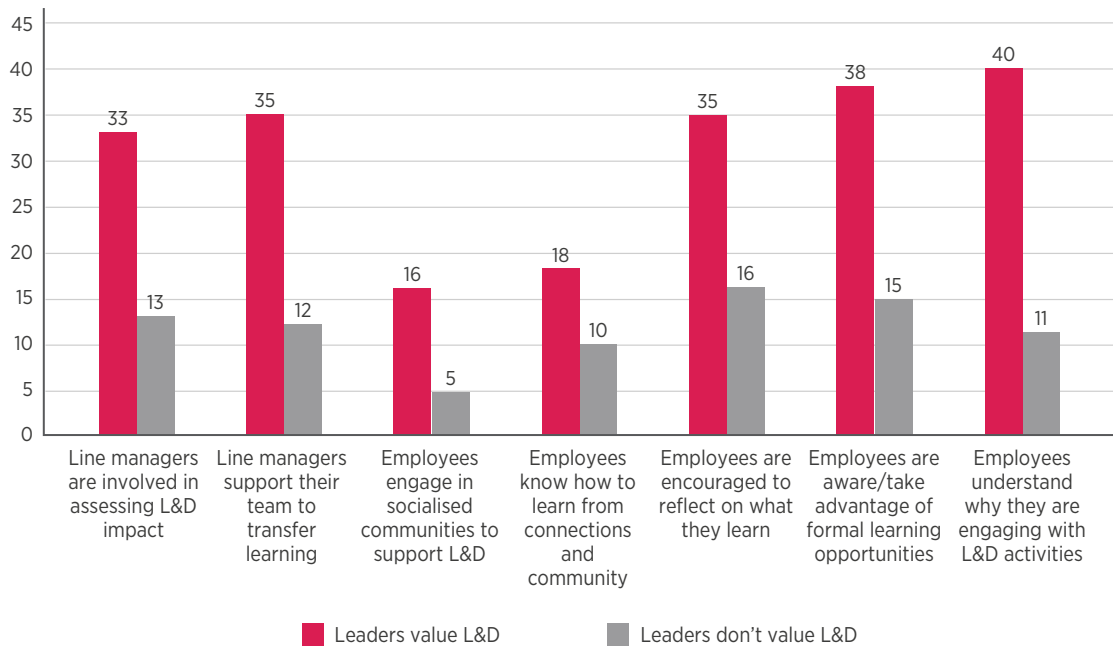
Base: leaders value employee L&D: 1,010; leaders do not value employee L&D: 209.

**Figure 13: Assessing impact and systems to capture learning (%)**



Base: leaders value employee L&D: 1,010; leaders do not value employee L&D: 209.

**Figure 14: Learning valued by senior leaders and whether systems are in place to support employee and team learning (%)**



Base: leaders value employee L&D: 1,010; leaders do not value employee L&D: 209.

**Business proximity – centralised versus decentralised L&D**

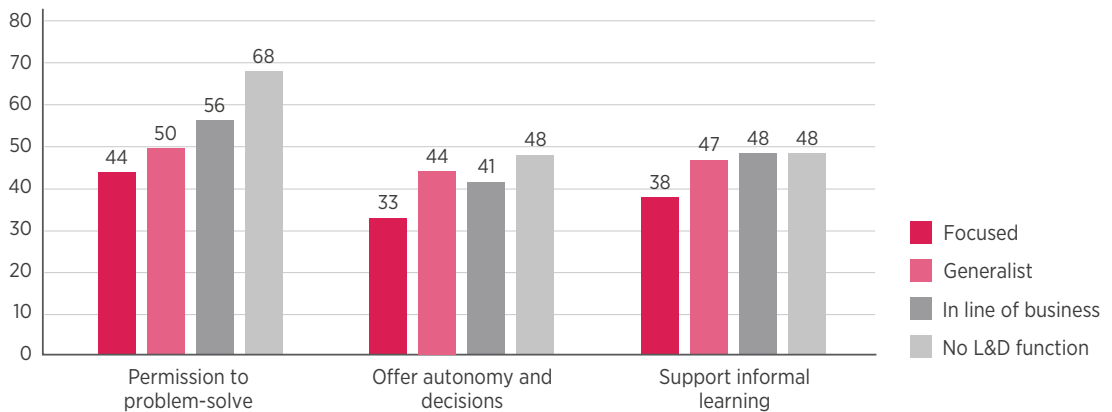
However, as the next section shows, alignment may partly be a function of where accountability for learning sits within an organisation. Where L&D sits within a business function, organisations are more likely to create a supportive environment for learning and are able to respond more agilely to changing skills needs. Organisations where L&D is a separate and focused function should prioritise closer connection and collaboration with the business.

Meanwhile, the benefits of having a more specialised focus on L&D should not be lost. Where the function is clearly set apart, we see more dedicated investment by organisations in key learning interventions, and more willingness to embrace and innovate around digital solutions.

### Ownership and psychological safety

Organisations where learning accountability is with line managers or senior leaders, or where the learning function is in the line of business, are much more likely to report that they have a supportive environment in place for learning (for more detail on creating a supportive environment, see **Clarity, connection and collaboration**). This illustrates the opportunity for focused L&D in HR teams to become more embedded and to understand how to harness business culture to leverage it for learning.

**Figure 15: Selected wider workforce practices by where learning accountability sits in organisations (%)**

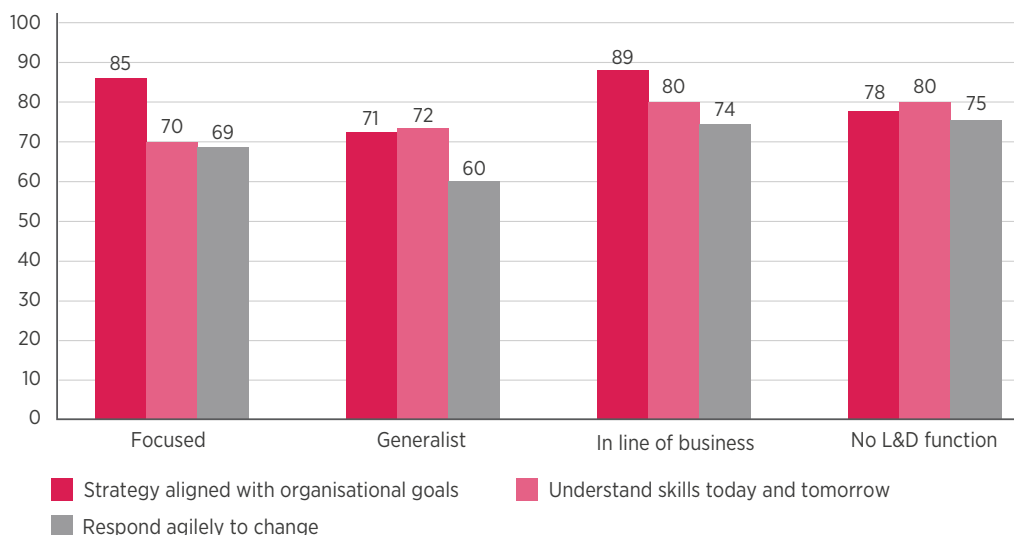


Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

### Alignment and responsiveness

Organisations where L&D accountability is within a specialist function, or when it is in the line of business, are much more likely to agree or strongly agree that their learning strategy is aligned with organisational goals (85% and 89%), compared with organisations where there is no learning function (78%) or where learning accountability is within a general HR function (71%). However, business leaders in organisations where L&D sits with senior leaders or managers, or where the learning function is in operations, are more likely to report that they understand the skills needed to be successful in the future and that they are able to respond agilely to the changing skills needs of the organisation.

**Figure 16: Alignment and responsiveness (% agree or strongly agree)**



Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

### Embracing digital opportunity

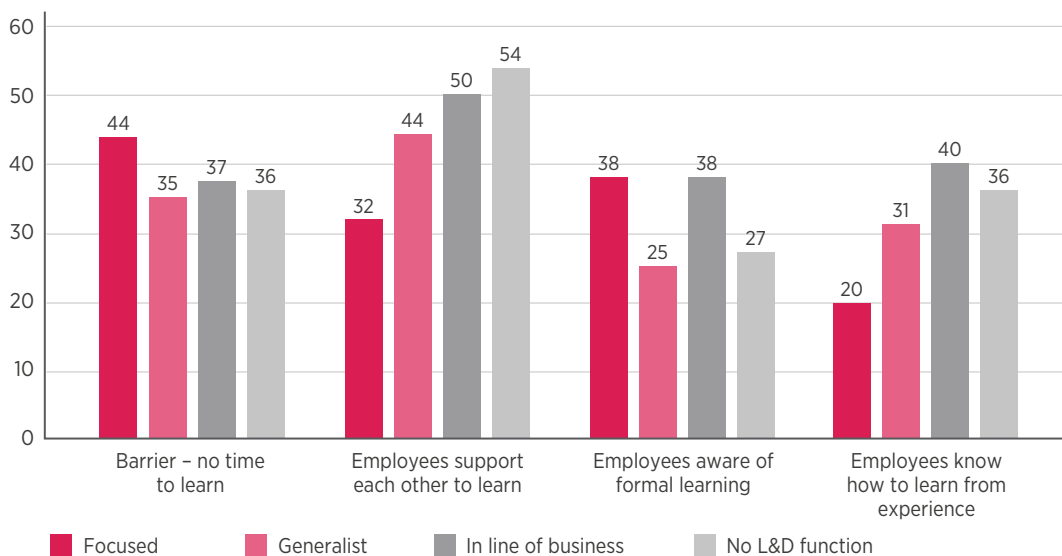
However, organisations where learning sits closer to the business are less likely to be harnessing technology to support learning. Organisations where learning sits within a specialist function within HR are more likely to be adopting a sophisticated approach to using technology to support learning and collaboration: 21% are classed as sophisticated users compared with just 13% of where learning sits in the line of business, and just 9% where L&D is part of a general HR function. They are also more likely to report that they are innovating in their use of learning technologies (68%) compared with when learning sits in the line of business or within a general HR function (figures of 65% and 54% respectively).

### Learning transfer and community

Increasingly organisations are seeing learning not in terms of isolated interventions, but rather as the ongoing transfer of knowledge, skills and behaviours that comes through the everyday connections made between colleagues and within teams. This type of social learning is typically informal and self-directed, occurring as and when the need arises. It already takes place in almost every workplace. How can we better harness its potential in our learning and development strategies?

While Figure 17 suggests that focused is fine for formal learning, practitioners could learn more from getting closer to the business to better understand how to support peer-to-peer learning and learning from experience.

Figure 17: Formal and informal learning, by where learning sits in organisation (%)



Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

### Holistic employee experience

What is clear from Figure 18 is that centralised/focused L&D decisions made in the last year are more likely to have prioritised learning interventions that span both formal learning (programmes, accredited qualifications and apprenticeships) and more informal learning support (coaching, mentoring and learning in the flow of work). This has the potential to create a more holistic learning experience for employees and staff, where there are potentially more options to support learning across all of the five moments of need (see below). The HR generalists operating across all functions are least prepared to support a wide range of learning contexts. Those learning professionals in the line of



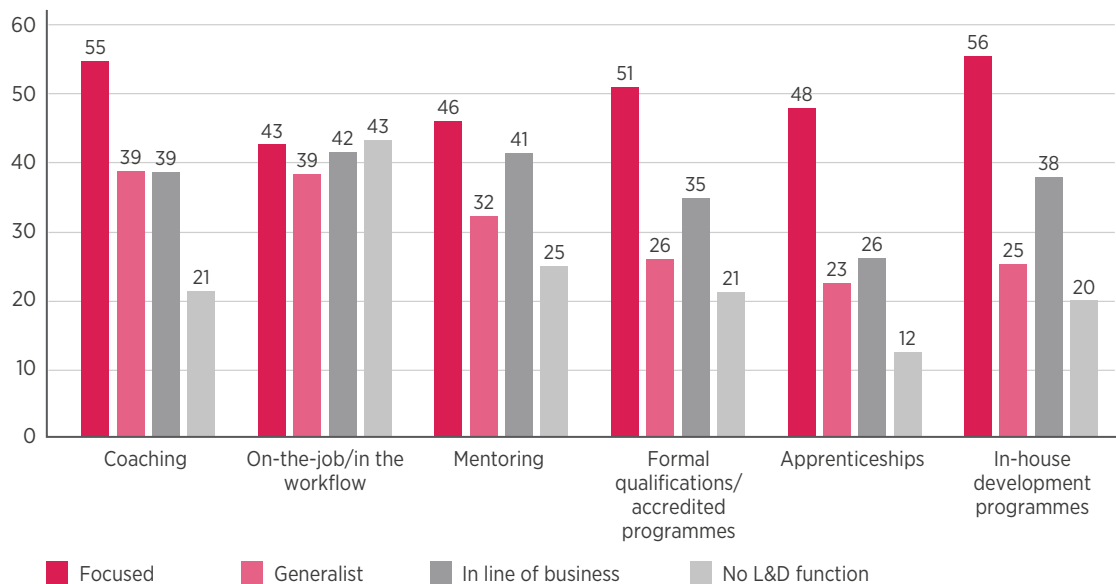
business will be more likely to support learning in the flow of work, which is great for when things go wrong or for supporting change. They also have a focus on mentoring, which may be one of the few sources of new insight for individuals.

What is clear is that the full range of holistic learning support necessary for the new world of work is not a given from either focused L&D specialists or those working more directly with the lines of business (see Figure 18). This is an opportunity for future growth.

**Five moments of need<sup>11</sup>**

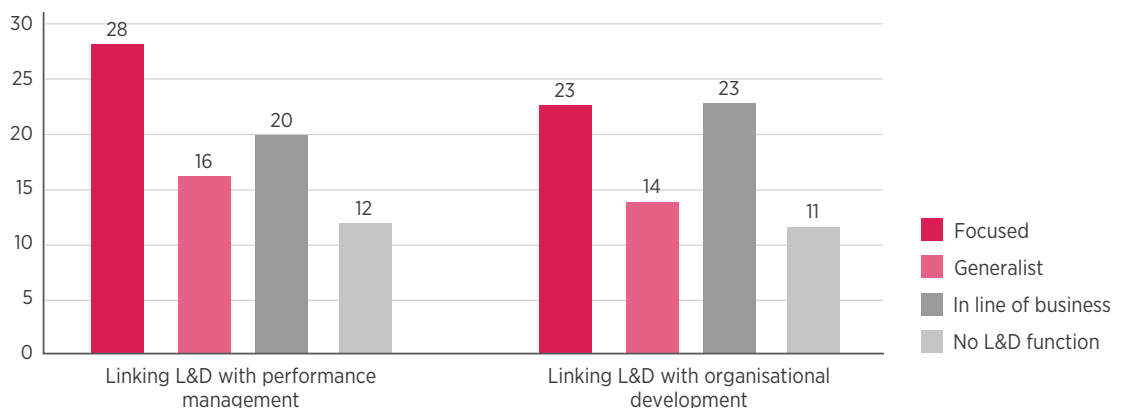
- learning for the first time (new)
- learning more (more)
- applying what you've learned (apply)
- when things go wrong (solve)
- when things change (change)

**Figure 18: Selected learning intervention arranged or funded last year, by where learning sits in organisation (%)**



Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

**Figure 19: Selected linking learning with performance and organisational development was a priority (%)**



Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

### Case study: Barchester Healthcare – Backing the core business purpose

**Challenge:** In light of the pandemic, Barchester needed to introduce tighter infection controls, and to ensure that they had enough staff in place to maintain the delivery of high-quality care at a time when some employees were having to shield or isolate.

**Solution:** Barchester had already introduced changes to enable an agile response to the pandemic, including transparent career pathways for clinical, leadership and hospitality careers, innovative new programmes to support progression, as well as a digital learning platform that provides insight into the employee journey, the impact of learning interventions and where to target resources to address performance issues. Additionally, the L&D team worked with operational leaders to:

- Convert all face-to-face learning and competency assessment to e-learning and enabled e-learning induction to be completed prior to joining to enable faster onboarding
- Adapt the digital platform to provide training to over 650 volunteers
- Develop a skills matrix for front-line roles so the additional training could be provided to reskill and enable cover in areas where there may have been staff shortages
- Accelerate development of over 90 care practitioners who were mid-programme
- Develop bite-sized leadership training to ensure that they were equipped and supported to lead in challenging times
- Establish an Advanced Carer Programme to enable senior carers to step up and support if there were nurse or care practitioner shortages.

### Practical implications

#### How to co-create organisational value

The past year created a unique climate where often siloed business functions are now working together to help the organisation respond rapidly to change. This has created a significant opportunity for business leaders and learning leaders to collaborate in solving critical business challenges.

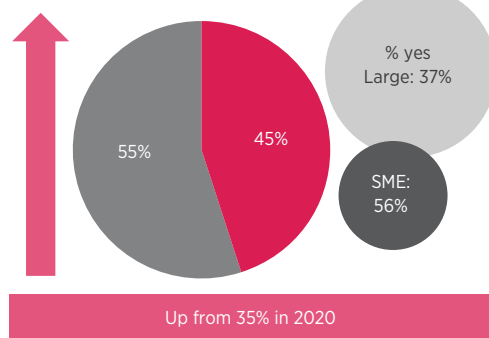
Our top three recommendations to continue to co-create better business value are:

- **Learning leaders – work on business problems** – invest in skills to support performance consulting to build better understanding of root causes, be prepared to say no to requests that don't link directly to meeting business priorities.
- **Business leaders – expect more than a course!** – the past year has shown how L&D teams can creatively support business value even when the traditional course is not available. Stop asking for courses and instead expect your learning professionals to bring their expertise to solve business challenges.
- **Break down siloes** – work to harness the effective learning practices that have surfaced across the business (with or without L&D intervention). Leverage internal and external data to improve individual, team and organisational learning.

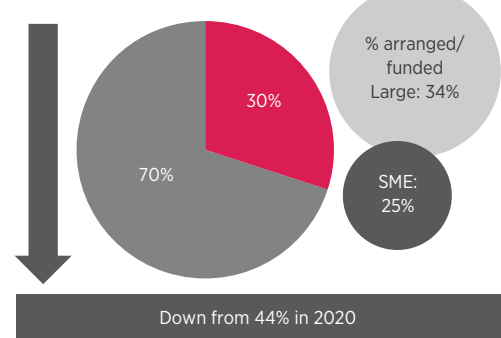
Laura Overton, independent industry analyst

## 6 Clarity, connection and collaboration

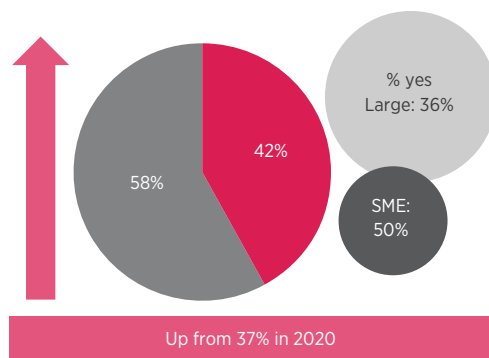
We develop and maintain an organisational 'climate of trust'...



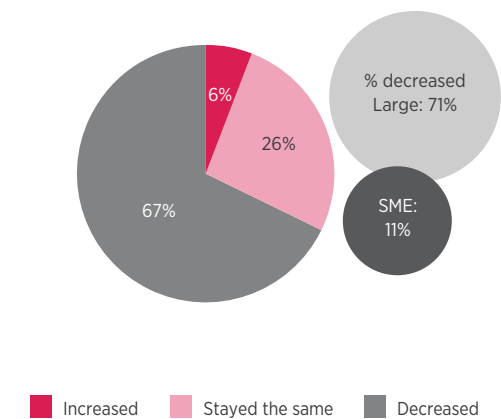
% who report using collaboration with peers (last 12 months)...



Employees support each other to learn...



Use of face-to-face solutions last 12 months...



■ Yes ■ No

■ Increased ■ Stayed the same ■ Decreased

### At a glance: clarity, connection and collaboration

The survey finds that while connection via the classroom and collaboration through formal L&D programmes may have decreased, the last year has seen a shift towards wider organisation collaboration:

- The use of face-to-face learning solutions has been severely impacted by the pandemic, with 67% of organisations reporting a decrease.
- Collaboration through formal L&D programmes has also fallen. The proportion of organisations that have funded or arranged collaboration with peers in the last 12 months has dropped from 44% in 2020 to 30% in 2021.
- However, there has been an upward swing, from 35% to 45%, in the proportion of organisations reporting that they develop and maintain an organisational climate of trust, and a slight increase in the proportion of organisations reporting that employees support each other to learn (from 37% in 2020 to 42% in 2021).

### Introduction and context

The ability to facilitate social and collaborative learning is a central component of a modern learning strategy. While the concepts of peer learning and communities of practice are not new, they are a vital part of a continuous learning culture and require knowledge and skills that appear to be lacking across the industry. The successful facilitation of social collaboration requires the scaffolding of environments that encourage trust and effective

networking, be they physical or digital spaces, a culture that encourages openness, the provision of resources to help foster discussion, and community management that supports rather than controls the interaction.<sup>12</sup>

**Connection via the classroom and formal L&D programmes**

As we have already seen, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a huge shift in how organisations approach and deliver learning and development. Yet, while there have been large declines in the majority of formal and more traditional forms of learning interventions, organisations have maintained a focus on mentoring and coaching initiatives and programmes.

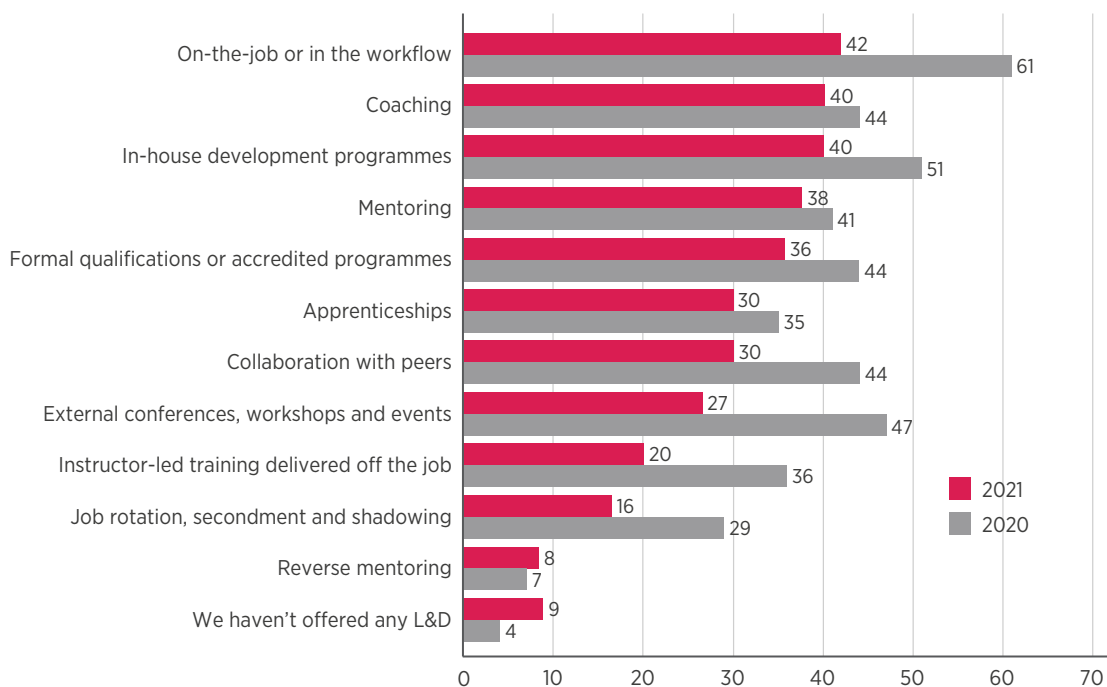
Downward shift:

- on the job or in the workflow (from 61% in 2020 to 42% in 2021)
- instructor-led training delivered off the job (from 36% to 20%)
- in-house development programmes (from 51% to 40%)
- apprenticeships (from 35% to 30%)
- formal qualifications or accredited programmes (from 44% to 36%)
- job rotation, secondment and shadowing (from 29% to 16%)
- collaboration with peers (from 44% to 30%)
- external conferences, workshops and events (from 47% to 27%).

Steady state:

- coaching (44% in 2020 vs 40% in 2021)
- mentoring (41% in 2020 vs 38% in 2021)
- reverse mentoring (7% in 2020 vs 8% in 2021).

**Figure 20: Which of the following types of learning and development has your organisation arranged or funded for employees in the past 12 months? (%)**



Base: all respondents 2021: 1,219; all respondents 2020: 1,217.

## Connection and collaboration – the wider environment for workplace learning

### The learning environment

There are several levels of learning in an organisation: individual, team and organisational:

- **Organisational learning:** Businesses need structures and systems in place to support learning, as well as a shared vision for learning and transformation.
- **Teams:** Teams are a key place where social learning and dialogue can occur. Managers have a key role to play in ensuring that their employees also have the relevant support for learning.
- **Individuals:** For individual employees, learning needs to take place in a supportive environment that allows employees to apply their learning.

To support organisational, individual and team learning, organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things to drive adaptation and innovation. While this is often referred to as learning culture, our recent research has argued that it is more useful to call this the learning environment, and to focus on tangible organisational practices and behaviours.

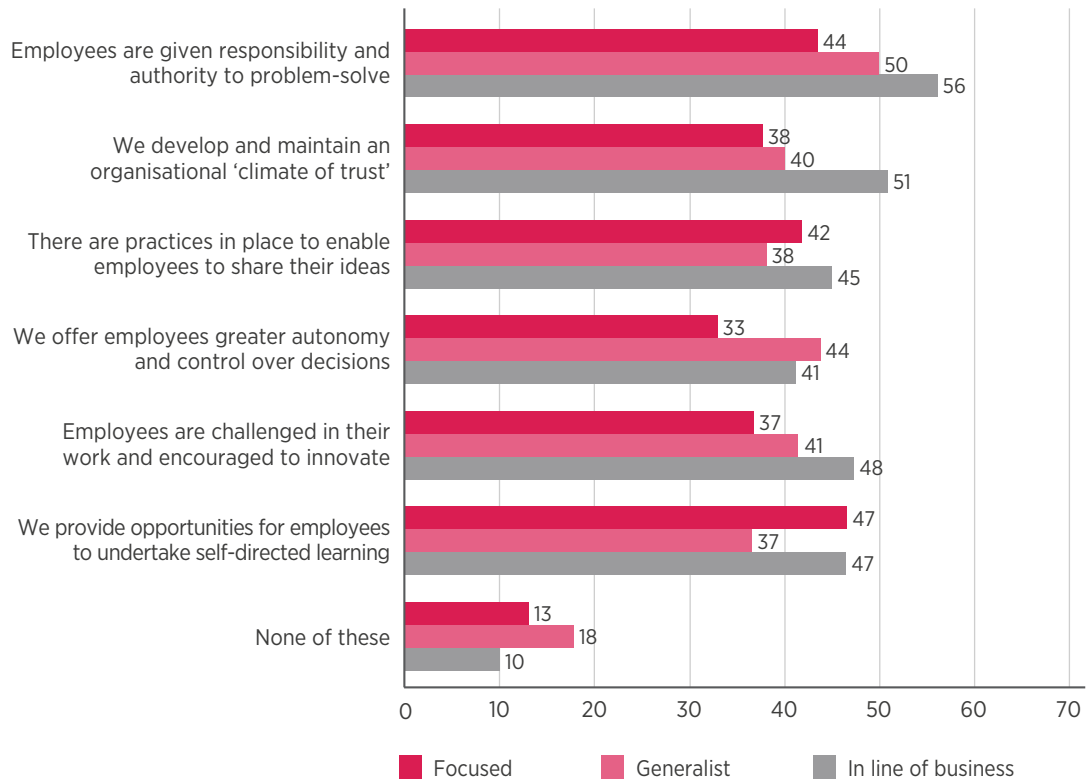
Looking more broadly at the wider learning environment and the workplace practices that support it suggests that while there has been a slight improvement on some of the key measures, much remains unchanged compared with last year. However, a deeper dive into the differences between respondents, focusing on where accountability for learning sits within organisations, reveals some insights and learning points. In particular, the closer learning is to the business, the more positive behaviours at the organisational, managerial and individual levels.

### Creating a climate for learning

Embedding learning into the organisation's way of doing things not only calls for the right processes and tools. It also requires a leadership approach that provides a collective vision for learning and that encourages people to speak up, ask questions and share ideas. This means fostering a climate of psychological safety, so that no one feels that they will be penalised if they ask for help or admit to a mistake.

Organisations where the learning function sits within the line of business are more likely to report that in their organisation employees are given responsibility and authority to problem-solve, that they develop and maintain a 'climate of trust', and that employees are challenged in their work and encouraged to innovate.

**Figure 21: Which of these statements about employees reflects the wider learning environment in your organisation? (%)**



Base: focused: 330; generalist: 173; in the line of business: 127.

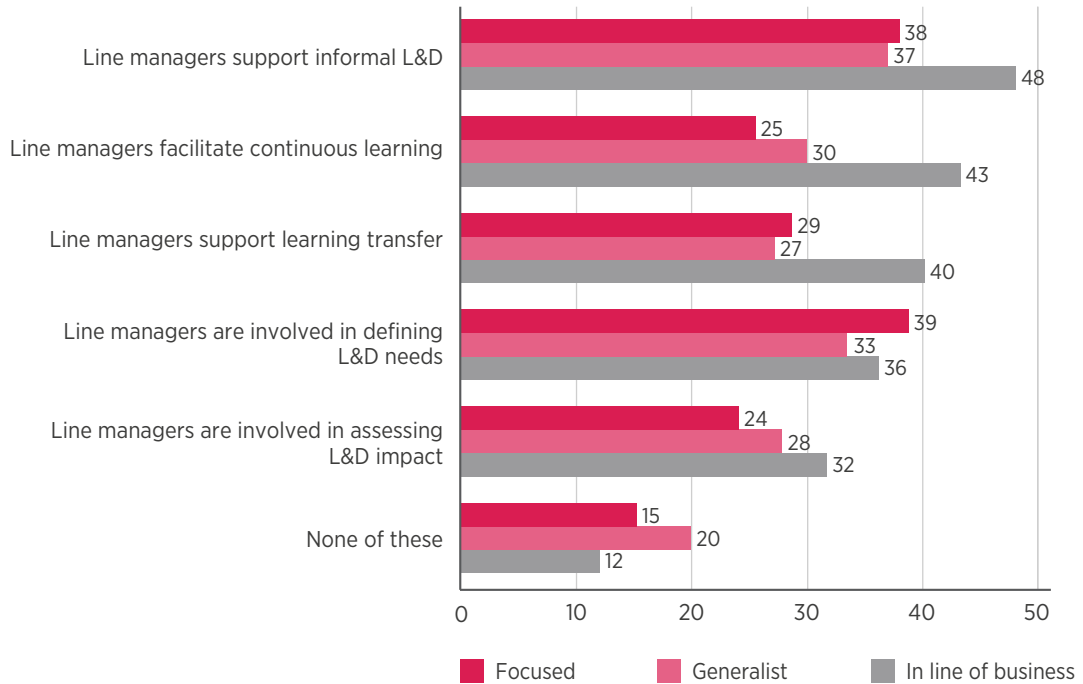
### Role of line manager in supporting learning

Previous research has shown that line managers play a pivotal role when it comes to an organisation’s people, significantly influencing personal and work outcomes for individuals, such as health and wellbeing, employee voice and enabling HR practices.<sup>13</sup>

Line managers are critical in supporting continuous learning at work and need to be supported to enable them to take more responsibility for the growth and development of their people in their daily working lives. They are key to shaping workplace culture and fostering a work environment that is productive and supportive of learning. This means identifying learning needs, encouraging participation in learning, helping to assess learning impact, supporting both formal and informal learning and valuing non-training ways of learning, adopting modern learning practices themselves, and encouraging the sharing of knowledge and experiences in their teams.

Figure 22 shows that where learning sits within the line of business, line managers are more likely to be taking an active role in supporting informal learning and development, facilitating continuous learning, and supporting learning transfer.

**Figure 22: Which of the following statements about line managers reflects the wider learning environment in your organisation? (%)**



Base: focused: 330; generalist: 173; in the line of business: 127.

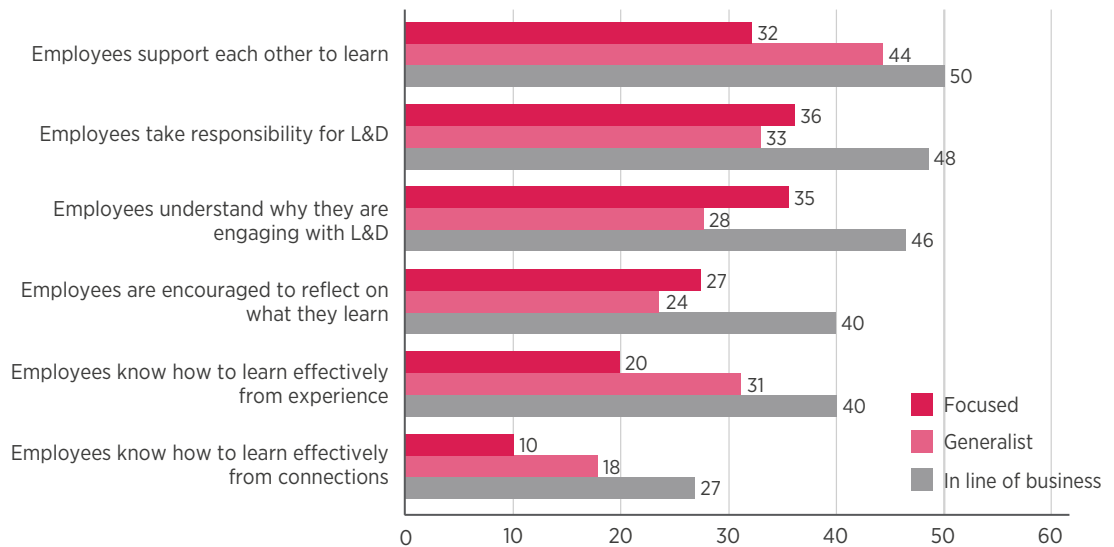
**Business proximity drives employer learning engagement**

In supportive learning environments, learning takes place using many methods, including using face-to-face and digital methods and by leveraging peer-to-peer and social learning communities. A supportive learning environment also allows time for a pause in the action and encourages thoughtful review and reflection; when people are too busy, stressed by deadlines and schedules, they are less able to diagnose problems and learn from their experiences.

Learning needs to take place in a supportive environment that allows employees to apply their learning. Employees need to understand why they are engaging, and the benefits for them individually, as well as for their team and the wider organisation. In organisations where learning sits in the line of business, employees are more likely to be engaged with their learning.

Figure 23 shows that in organisations where learning is structurally positioned closer to the business, organisations are more likely to report that employees support each other to learn, take responsibility for learning and development, know how to learn from connections, are encouraged to reflect on what they have learned, that they know why they are learning, and that they know how to learn from experience.

**Figure 23: Which of these statements about employees reflects the wider learning environment in your organisation? (%)**



Base: focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173.

### Case study: Sage – Building trust and psychological safety

**Challenge:** Pivoting from a perpetual licence software business to a software-as-a-service business required Sage to rethink the way it does business. This has required a laser focus on customers’ requirements, and on delivering a continuously improving service. Continuous service innovation requires a workplace environment that supports knowledge-sharing and collaboration. To build this, a high degree of trust and psychological safety, a diversity of voices and an environment in which all employees feel that they are listened to and valued is essential.

**Solution:** Sage focused on building leadership skills at senior leader level, as well as driving a continued focus on leadership and good management practices at line manager level. It also sought to enhance employee voice and engagement, as well as increase inclusion and diversity. Specific actions to date include:

- Development of a new leadership programme with London Business School to ensure senior leaders are fully aligned to their vision and values
- Equipping line managers with the skills and capability needed to create high-performing teams – over 90% of its leaders now have ‘licence to lead’
- Investment in colleague engagement and experience, such as through an online forum and pulse surveys to understand how employees feel about working at Sage
- Looking beyond representation and inclusion to creating belonging, fostering a culture and environment that make people feel confident, trusted and listened to.

### Practical implications

The role of the line manager as the key stakeholder in the learning process is evident in this section. How L&D ensures the line manager gets the support and development is critical to the successful transfer of any learning. To that end we need to ask ourselves:



- At an organisation level – is there a common agreement across the organisation about the role of the line manager in the L&D provision?
- At a team level – can the team have honest conversations about learning, to ensure clarity of message, make connections with existing knowledge and collaborate with peers to drive performance?
- And on an individual level – how are individuals supported and encouraged to apply their learning in their work?

Asking ourselves these questions can then allow us to explore avenues to move forward with evolving our practice.

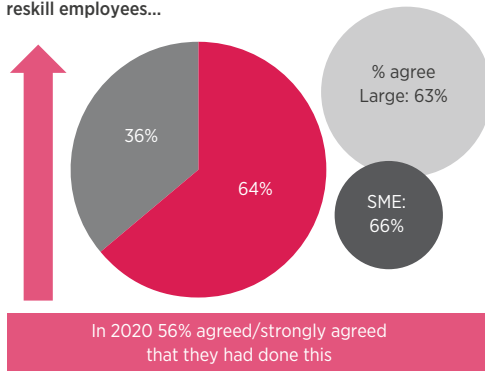
Top three recommendations:

- 1 Ask the above questions of all L&D stakeholders; don't assume your view of the line manager involvement is the same across all stakeholder groups.
- 2 Identify success stories where this is happening already (there may be examples of informal coaching and mentoring or team meetings with a learning focus).
- 3 Review any leadership or management development programmes to identify where the message to line managers is clear, and remove topics that don't add value or can be offered through alternative means (for example reading, video, infographics).

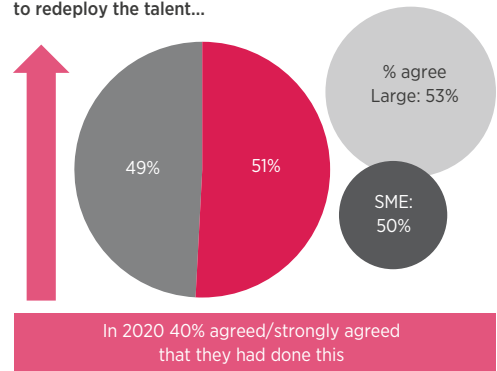
David Hayden, Digital Learning Portfolio Manager, CIPD

## 7 Agility and future skills

We have assessed which roles are changing and how to reskill employees...

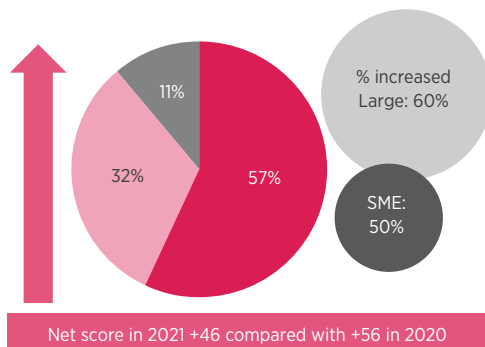


We have assessed impact of automation on roles and how to redeploy the talent...

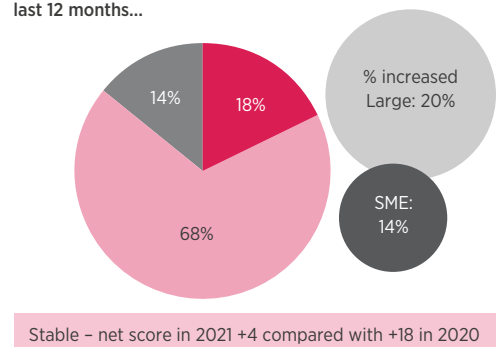


■ Agree ■ Disagree

Overall L&D team workload in the last 12 months...



Use of education institutions/professional bodies last 12 months...



■ Increased ■ Stayed the same ■ Decreased

### At a glance: organisational readiness

The survey finds that the evolving world of work and the catalyst of the pandemic have driven up the demand for workforce agility and the need for reskilling and redeployment. Compared with last year, skilling and reskilling feature more prominently on organisational agendas but questions remain about how well learning professionals are equipped to deal with them:

- Compared with last year, a greater proportion of organisations report that they have assessed how roles are changing and how to reskill (64%) and the impact of automation and how to redeploy (51%).
- Yet, despite a greater proportion reporting that they are prepared for reskilling, learning professionals are under increasing pressure in terms of workload, with 57% reporting an increase.

### Reskilling context

Given the recent COVID-19 crisis, demands on people professionals have never been greater. While much of this demand has forced the profession to focus and prioritise key areas such as employee wellbeing, it has also accelerated other wider trends and drivers, particularly calls for more agile ways of working and responding rapidly to industrial, technological and economic change. Our [recent research](#) on the people profession found that economic change, digital transformation and organisational agility were viewed as the biggest drivers of change, with digital transformation and organisational agility collectively recognised by 70% of respondents as key drivers for change.

The current crisis has underlined the need for organisations to be able to respond agilely to the stresses and strains of a new reality.<sup>14</sup> Yet, change is not unique to 2021; even before COVID-19, it was clear that the world of work in 2030 was going to look considerably different from today. Tasks, roles and entire jobs were set to transform, as technology rapidly changes work and drives up demand for new and higher skills.

From a skills perspective, organisations are increasingly recognising that to prepare for the future requires the merging and expansion of two very different skillsets: the uniquely human skills of creativity, problem-solving and resilience, alongside deep technical skills like cybersecurity, data, cloud and artificial intelligence. The pandemic has only further underlined the critical importance of these skills, as the ability to be resilient, to learn and adapt, in the face of such challenges is vital for organisations and individuals alike.

The changing world of work is also reshaping the skills demanded from learning professionals. Our previous research has demonstrated these deep data and analytical skills are increasingly in demand, yet we found that many practitioners still need to develop basic analytics skills.<sup>15</sup> People professionals have a tremendous opportunity here, but leaders will need to invest significantly to grow their function's capabilities in this in-demand area.

### The skills gap

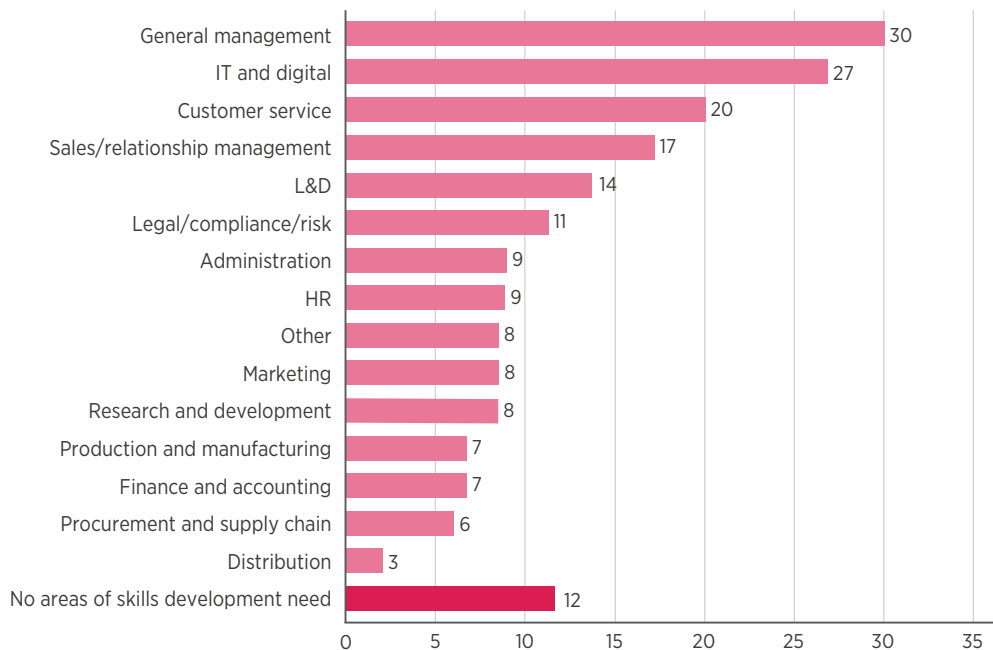
The organisational area with the greatest need for skills development among employees (Figure 24) is general management, identified by a third of organisations; this is followed by IT and digital (27%) and customer service (20%). Compared with last year, organisations are placing an increased emphasis on addressing skills needs in IT and digital functions (last year this ranked third, at 21%). This is likely due to the massive shift to remote working and the need to provide digital solutions.

Looking at the types of skills gaps employers are facing (Figure 25), technical skills, that is, the specialist knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific role, topped the list of skills that need improvement. In the age of automation, while developing technical fluency will be important, so will 'human', 'soft' skills development. It is these skill areas

that closely followed technical skills, with communication, teamworking, and resilience and learning skills needing improvement among employees in around a third of organisations.

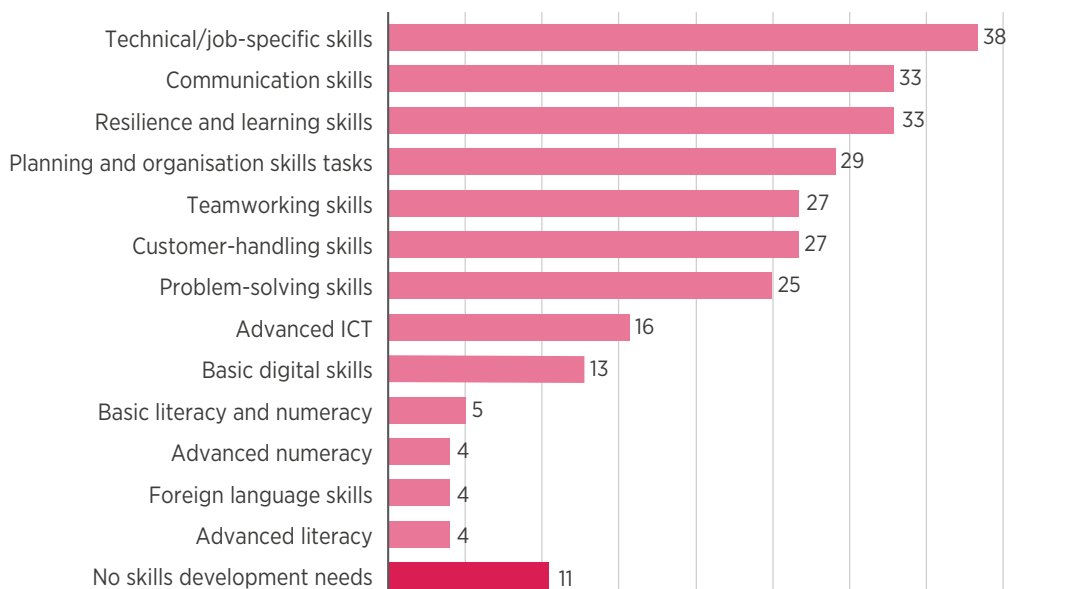
However, addressing skills gaps in advanced digital skills (16%) and basic digital skills (13%) are only mentioned by a minority of respondents. This lack of focus on the need to address digital skills gaps is concerning given the growing importance of digital skills for almost all job roles. For instance, an analysis of job adverts conducted in 2019 found that digital skills were an essential entry requirement for two-thirds of UK occupations, required in 82% of job roles advertised online.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 24: In which areas of your organisation are you seeing the greatest need for skills development among employees? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

**Figure 25: Which skills areas are in greatest need of improvement among employees in your organisation? (%)**

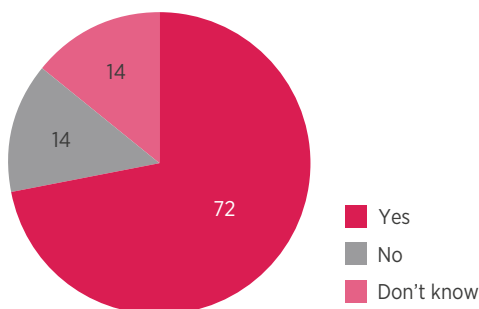


### Misplaced confidence?

The pandemic and its ongoing effects have been a catalyst for organisations to assess the roles they have and how they are changing, as well as push skilling and reskilling up the agenda. The vast majority of organisations are confident in their ability to address skills gaps (Figure 26); however, questions remain about whether both organisations and the L&D functions within them are truly cognisant of the scale and pace of change and whether their confidence to address them is firmly founded. For instance, the last section showed the skills identified as needing to be developed have not shifted considerably.

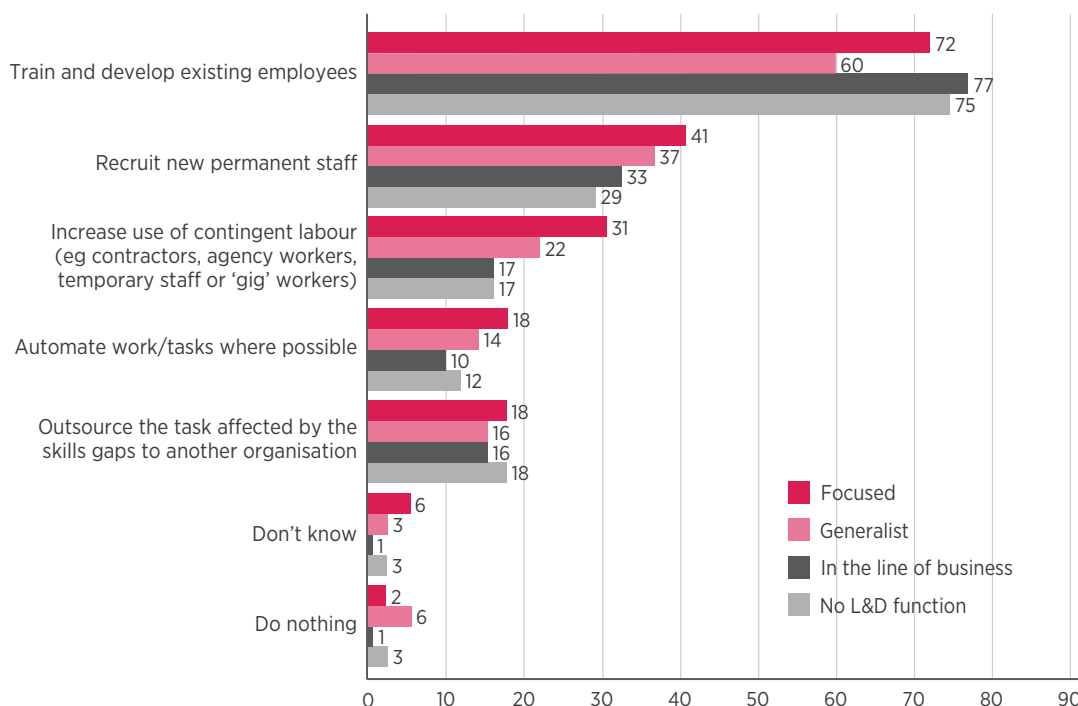
Overall, the most commonly reported approach to addressing skills gaps is to train and develop existing employees. However, responses differ depending on where learning accountability sits in an organisation (Figure 27). Those with no learning and development function or where L&D sits in the line of business are more likely to report that they develop and train existing staff (figures of 75% and 77% respectively). However, those with learning professionals who sit within HR teams are more inclined to recruit or use contingent workforce.

**Figure 26: Do you think your organisation is able to effectively address the skills gaps you have identified? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

**Figure 27: Typical response when faced with skills gaps in your existing workforce (%)**



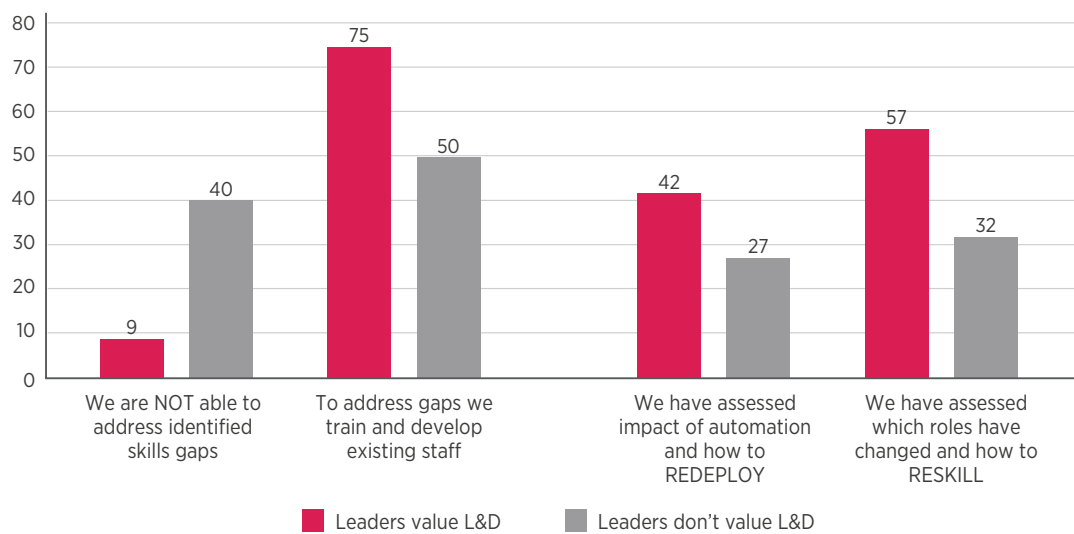
Base: all respondents (those able to tackle skills gaps): 781; no L&D function: 170; generalist: 89; in the line of business: 84; focused: 216.

### The collective reskilling agenda

The value placed on learning and development in organisations has a large impact on how organisations approach the reskilling agenda. Figure 28 shows a clear pattern in organisations where learning isn't valued by senior leaders:

- They are much more likely to report that they don't think they can address the skills gaps they have identified.
- They are less likely to respond to skills gaps by training and developing existing employees.
- And they are much less likely to have assessed how roles have changed and how they can reskill and redeploy employees.

**Figure 28: Whether senior leaders value learning and development affects the approach to skills and reskilling (%)**



Base: leaders value employee L&D: 1,010; leaders do not value employee L&D: 210.

### Reskilling the learning function

#### Roles for an agile future

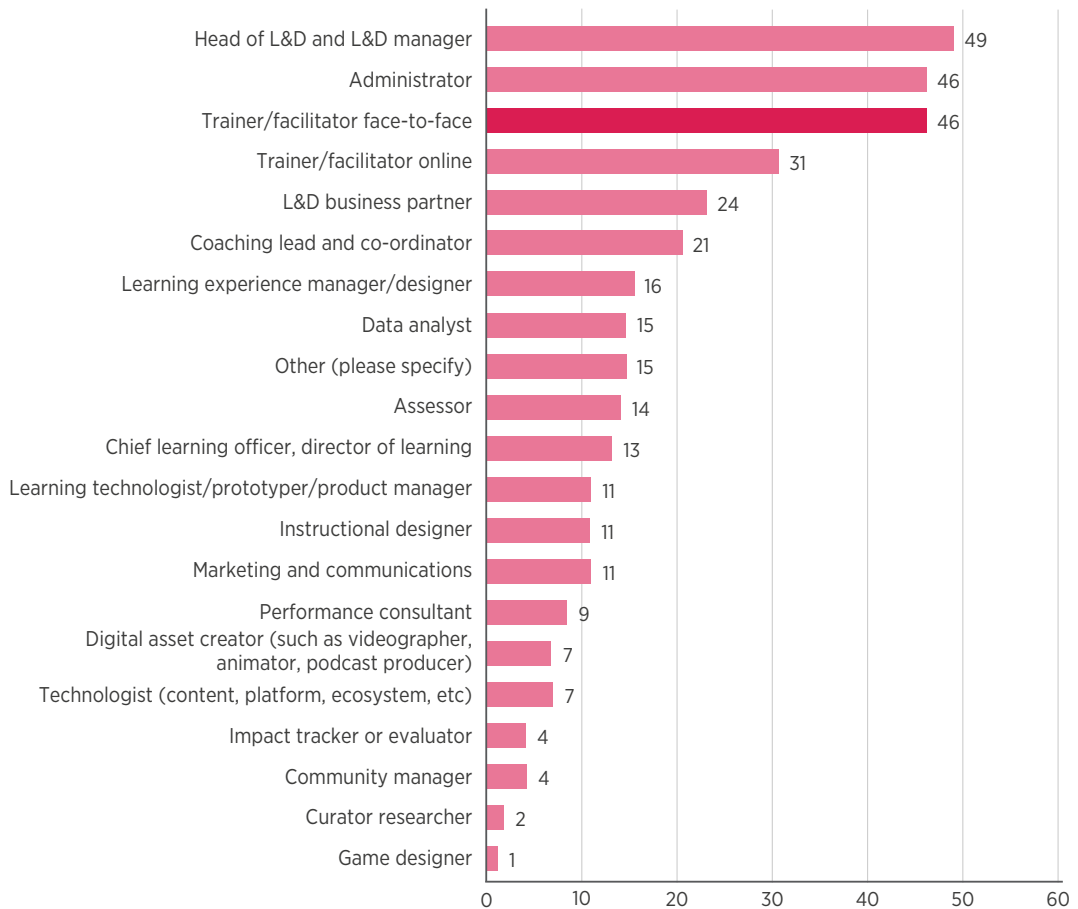
The learning function itself needs to be agile and future-focused if it is to support organisational agility and meet future skills needs. However, while 81% of respondents report that they either agree or strongly agree that they understand the skills they have in their L&D team and the ones they need for tomorrow, many still do not have the roles in place to support the shift to new forms of delivery and ways of working.<sup>17</sup>

#### Current roles

Apart from the rise in the proportion of online facilitators, more digitally oriented L&D roles are still very much the minority. Addressing the skills gap needs to be a collective process. This involves getting leaders to buy into L&D, but importantly will need L&D functions to also prepare themselves.

While there has been an upward shift in the proportion of organisations reporting online trainer/facilitator roles, the proportion reporting design roles, such as learning technologist/product owner (11%), digital asset creator (7%), and instructional designers (11%), has not moved at all and are still only reported by a minority of survey respondents. It may be the case that some of these roles are outsourced, for instance, carried out by freelancers on an ad hoc basis; however, the survey data suggests that the majority (60%) of learning content is developed in-house.

**Figure 29: Roles that exist within L&D function (%)**



Base: all those with an L&D function: 922.

**Case study: Standard Chartered – Reskilling to redeployment and beyond**

**Challenge:** Advances in automation and technology are shifting the ways Standard Chartered operates, creates value and delivers products and services. The impact on the skills required will be significant, with initial analysis suggesting that up to 7,000 data and technology-related roles would be needed over the next five years.

**Solution:** Standard Chartered developed a learning infrastructure to support reskilling and redeployment. This includes a new learner experience platform, nine future skills academies, and a business sponsor network to help advertise and encourage learning. It also piloted an end-to-end reskilling and redeployment pathway for five ‘future’ roles, using a data-led approach to identify candidates based on the skills adjacency between their current role and the ‘future’ roles.

Their innovative end-to-end reskilling pathway provides safe and risk-free opportunities to build skills and get feedback via simulations, bite-sized learning to support building of core skills, connection with mentors to give first-hand experience of what the roles involve, and a focus on hiring manager behaviours to ensure successful transition through induction and development.

### Practical implications

You'll have heard the phrase 'skills are the new currency'. This research reinforces that reskilling is high on the agenda of organisations, L&D functions and employees – and even more so following the disruption and digital acceleration of the pandemic. The ability of organisations to change how they work and compete is dependent on reskilling. Workers need to reskill to remain relevant and employable throughout their careers.

Yet knowing where to start is a challenge. Many organisations do not understand the skills available in their organisation today or in the labour market, nor what's needed for the future. We're working with organisations to help them better target hiring and reskilling by using skills analytics. L&D cannot go on this journey alone, as they need to shape the future of work and skill requirements with the business and IT.

Reskilling is a big shift in culture too. It's about helping learners into continual learning. It's about helping them understand their strengths and potential, making choices about where they take their careers and starting to gain relevant experience. On topics like digital, data and cybersecurity, it's about everyone from the boardroom to the shop floor increasing their fluency, but it's also about creating deep, expert-level role-readiness in these specialist workforces.

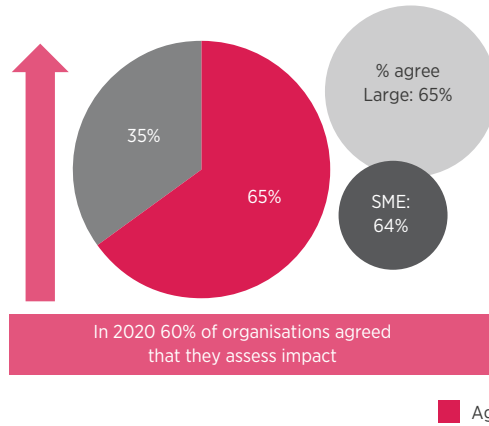
Our recommendations to build the skills of the future, in manageable chunks:

- **Understand the skills and capabilities** that will be required by the future organisation and the transition states along that journey.
- **Make a plan to build the future skills** – develop the plan to build the future skills and capabilities, considering hiring, new skilling and redeployment.
- **Put new skilling in your people's hands** – encourage continual learning and create the clear learning pathways and career choices towards future skills your people and your organisation need.

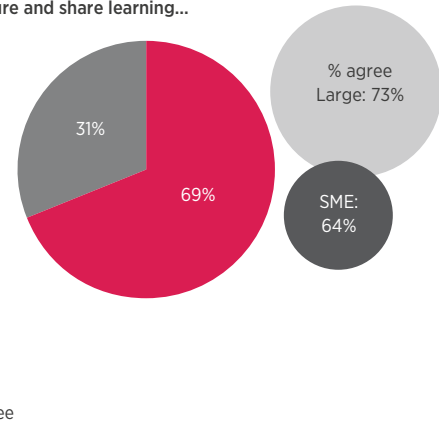
Andy Young, Managing Director, Accenture Talent & Organisation

## 8 Evidence and evaluation

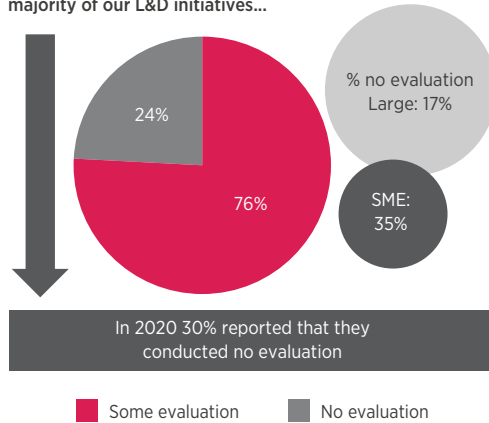
We assess the impact of learning and development...



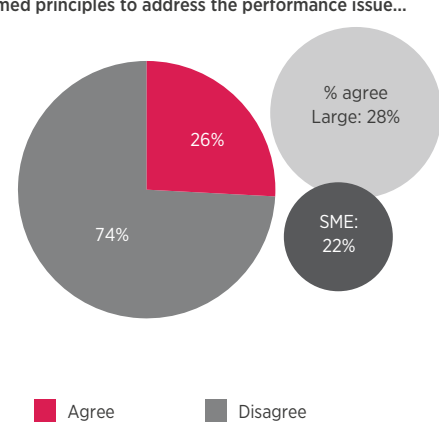
My organisation has accessible systems to capture and share learning...



We do not conduct any systematic evaluation of the majority of our L&D initiatives...



We design or make recommendations using evidence-informed principles to address the performance issue...



### At a glance: assessing performance and informing decisions

Positively, the survey finds that while resources might be low, organisations are more likely to seek evidence that they are used well. However, too few are using evidence to build effective programmes in the first place:

- 65% of organisations either agree or strongly agree that they assess the impact of learning and development, a slight increase on last year's figure of 60%.
- 69% of organisations either agree or strongly agree that they have systems in place to capture and share learning.
- However, just one in four report that they design or make recommendations using evidence-informed principles to address the performance issue, and one in four do not conduct any form of evaluation.

### Introduction and context

In today's fast changing world, for organisations to thrive, not just survive, they need to address the issue of performance and productivity. If learning professionals are to positively impact performance and improve productivity, they must work closely with the business to agree success criteria for the whole L&D offering as well as individual programmes, diagnose performance needs, and prioritise the available resources. They also need to recognise that measuring the impact, transfer and engagement of L&D activities



can't be done just by an end-of-course questionnaire or post-training survey; instead, evidence needs to permeate and inform every step of the decision-making process.

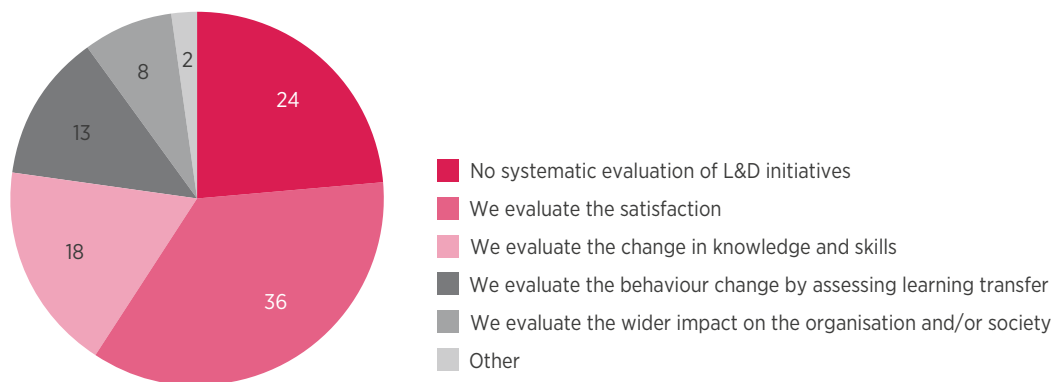
Research by Towards Maturity (now Emerald Works) found that high-performing learning organisations that embrace business insights are four times more likely than the average learning organisation to measure specific business metrics when evaluating the effectiveness of learning. Beyond this, top-performing learning organisations are also four times more likely than the average to use learning analytics to shape their future learning strategy and the services they deliver to align to the wider organisational needs.<sup>18</sup>

**Increased hunger to demonstrate impact**

Perhaps as a result of resources being more scarce, the proportion of organisations that are assessing the impact of L&D has encouragingly increased. Looking deeper, however, much of the evaluation or assessment is cursory – mostly judged by user satisfaction and only based on learning transfer or wider impact in a small minority of cases.

A slightly higher proportion (76% compared with a figure of 70% in 2020) of organisations evaluate the impact of their L&D initiatives in some way (Figure 30), although this is at varying levels. The most commonly reported way that the majority of L&D initiatives are evaluated is by participant satisfaction (36%); however, only a small minority are evaluating the wider impact on business or society (8%), and just 13% assess the behaviour change of participants by assessing the transfer of learning into the workplace.

**Figure 30: How organisations evaluate the majority of L&D initiatives (%)**



Base: all learning professionals: 327.

**Increased barriers to evaluation**

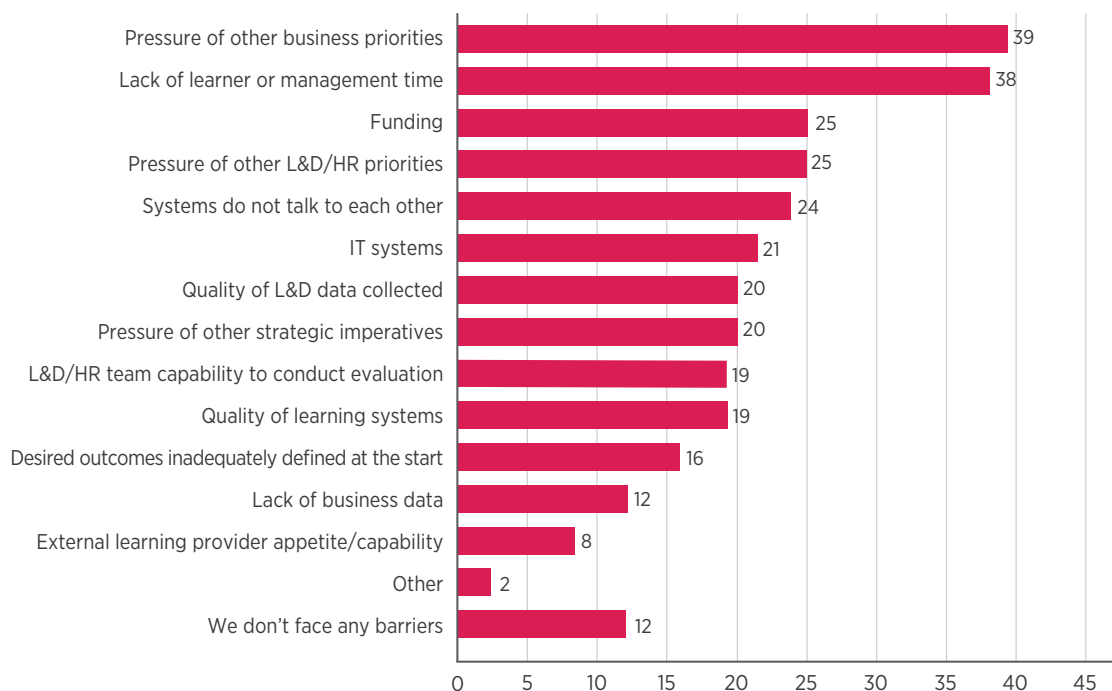
It should be acknowledged that getting to understand the impact of interventions does come with challenges, and these have intensified over the past year. Most organisations identify barriers to evaluating their L&D programmes and initiatives, from pressure of other business priorities to lack of management time. Although pressures have meant greater barriers to evaluation, the battle to be evidence-based is one that L&D teams need to fight and to win. Again, aligning with business will be crucial, as well as adopting learning to take place within usual workflows.

The vast majority (81%) experience barriers in evaluating their L&D initiatives (Figure 31). Pressure of other business priorities (39%) and lack of learner or management time (38%) are the most commonly reported obstacles, followed by funding (25%). The lack of learner and management time highlights that learning is often viewed as a separate activity and

not linked to the workflow. Many also report barriers within L&D/HR, in particular the pressures of other priorities (25%) and L&D/HR capability to conduct the evaluation (17%).

Compared with 2020, barriers to evaluation have intensified, particularly those related to lack of learner or management time (32% in 2020 compared with 38% in 2021) and pressure from other business priorities (28% in 2020 vs 39% in 2021). Fewer organisations reported that they face no barriers to evaluation (12%) compared with last year (19%). These findings are not surprising in the wider context of competing pressures of home and work lives, rapidly changing organisational priorities and the intensification of remote working during the last year.

**Figure 31: Barriers to evaluation of learning and development programmes and initiatives (%)**



Base: all learning professionals who evaluate: 284.

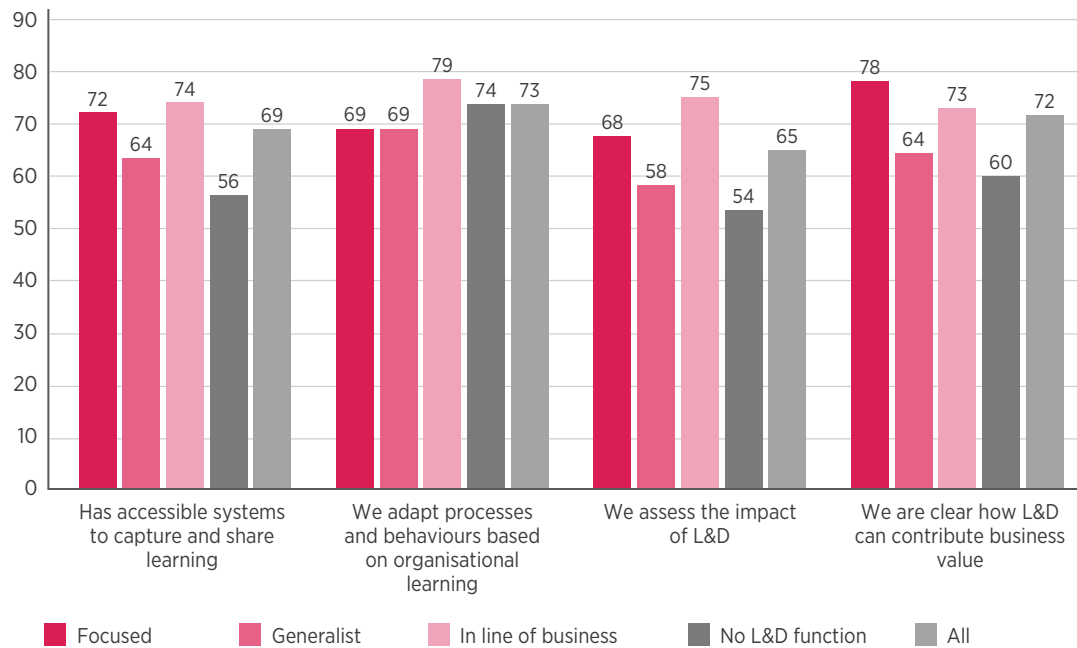
## Using evidence - the realities

### Evidence collection and workplace proximity

Where learning sits within an organisation affects how evidence about learning is collected, shared and assessed. Where learning is closer to the business, organisations are more likely to recognise the importance of being able to demonstrate the value and impact of learning.

Organisations with learning and development sitting in the line of business (74%) or where L&D is a specialist function within HR (72%) are more likely to have accessible systems to capture and share learning; they are also more likely to be clear about how L&D can contribute to business value (73% and 78% respectively). Organisations where L&D sits in the line of business are much more likely to report that they adapt processes and behaviours based on organisational learning (79%) and that they assess the impact of learning and development (75%).

**Figure 32: Use of evidence to inform learning and skills approaches, by where learning sits in an organisation (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219; focused: 330; in the line of business: 127; generalist: 173; no L&D function: 252.

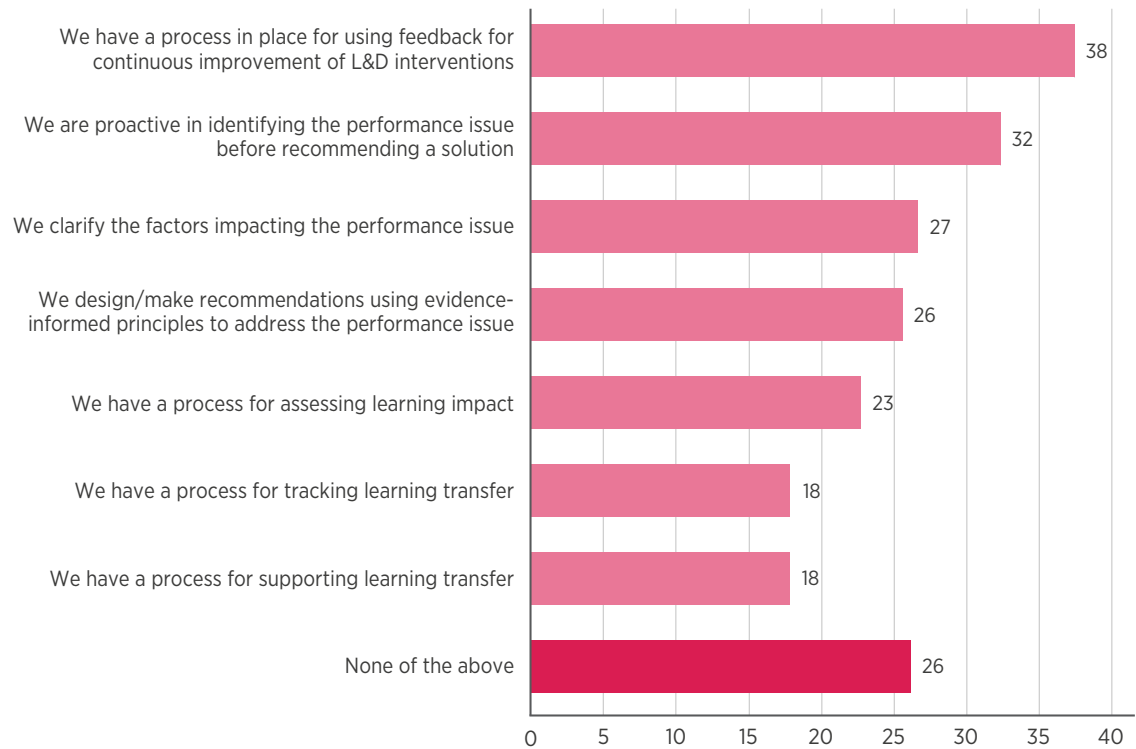
### Informing design

While most are evaluating their programmes in some way, the majority do not use evidence to inform programme design in the first place. This is a key area identified for improvement.

*With the prevalence of data in organisations, there is no shortage of insights to define learning priorities. The CIPD’s Profession Map stresses that it is vital for L&D professionals to ‘adopt a disciplined approach to understanding and diagnosing problems, and then use a range of evidence to develop people insights and solutions’ if they are to be successful.<sup>19</sup>*

Looking at the approach to evidence among learning and development professionals shows that the most reported way that L&D professionals add value through learning interventions is through using continuous feedback (38%). Only a third (32%) report that they are proactive in identifying the performance issue before recommending a solution, and only 26% design and make recommendations using evidence-informed principles to address the performance issue.

**Figure 33: Which of the following ways do you go about adding value through L&D interventions? (%)**



Base: all learning professionals: 372.

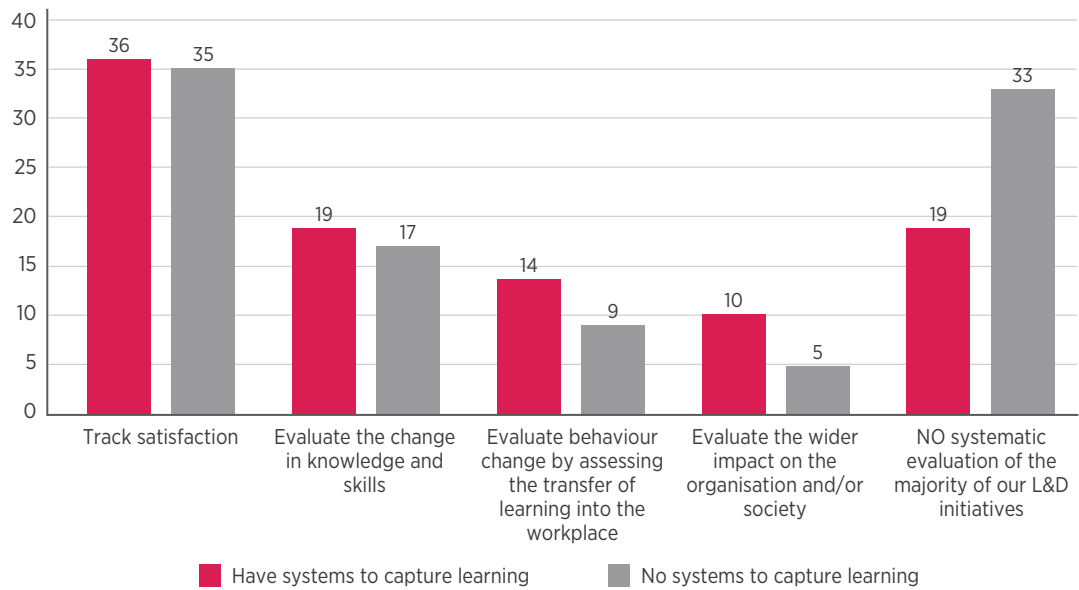
### Technology helps!

Those organisations with systems in place to capture and share learning are more likely to go beyond simplistic evaluations to capture evidence that will better inform programme design and assess the impact of interventions. Having a system to capture and share organisational learning is a good place to start; however, even for those with systems in place, there is still much more to be done to fully utilise the available data and evidence.

Figures 34 and 35 compare those who agree/strongly agree that they have systems in place to capture and share learning versus those who disagree:

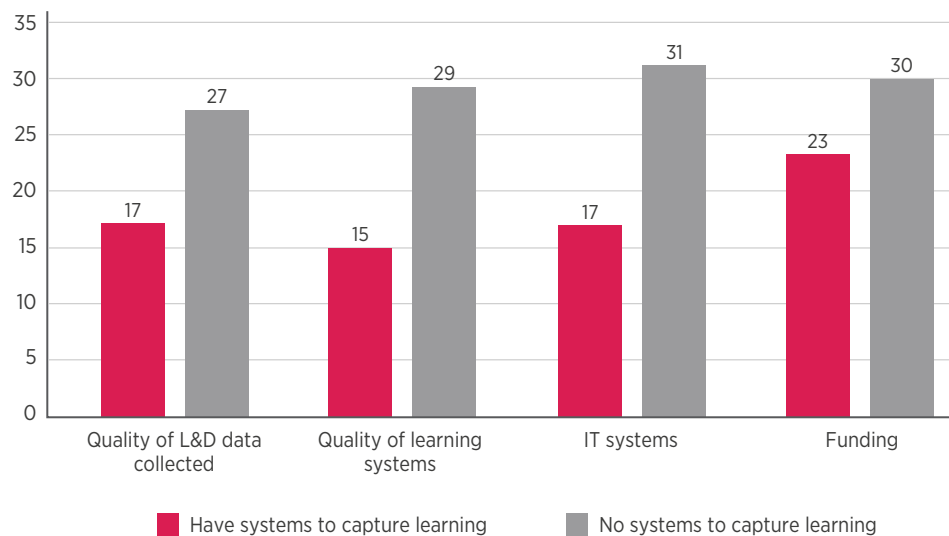
- Those who do not have a system in place to capture and share learning are more likely to report that they do not conduct any systematic evaluation of the majority of their learning and skills initiatives (33%). Yet almost one in five (19%) of those with systems in place still do not conduct any evaluation.
- Similar proportions report tracking satisfaction (35% of those with no systems compared with 36% of those with) and assessing improvements in knowledge and skills (17% vs 19%).
- However, those with systems are more likely to go beyond the ‘happy sheet’ when collating and using evidence (Figure 34); they are much more likely to evaluate learning transfer and the impact of learning on wider organisational metrics. Those with systems in place are also much less likely to report barriers to evaluation (Figure 35).

**Figure 34: Evaluation measures used (%)**



Base: have systems to capture and share learning: 844; no systems to capture and share learning: 375.

**Figure 35: Barriers to evaluating learning (%)**



Base: have systems to capture and share learning: 844; no systems to capture and share learning: 375.

**Case study: Santander – Data-driven decisions to reduce financial crime**

**Challenge:** With financial crime becoming increasingly sophisticated and regulation rapidly evolving, financial institutions like Santander must be proactive in detecting suspicious activity early, quick to take appropriate action and efficiently address gaps in systems and processes to prevent such crimes being committed again. It needs to build the right level of anti-financial crime (AFC) capability in its organisation to protect customers, shareholders and society from financial crime and demonstrate to regulators that it has a strong AFC capability development framework and learning offer that underpin a skilled workforce.

**Solution:** Action to date has included:

- Using an AI-based assessment to rapidly identify skill requirements and capability gaps
- The development and launch of a new AFC Academy in 2020, a centralised learning capability accessible to all colleagues for their financial crime knowledge development
- Setting up the AFC Academy to tie back to key business metrics, tracking learning impact, and raising its visibility and profile through sponsoring by the chief money laundering officer
- Leveraging internal subject-matter expertise on tackling financial crime and partnering with external consultants to harness external knowledge and expertise, to enable delivery at pace.

### Practical implications

If we're serious about learning impacting performance, the measurement of its efficacy must be at the top of the learning team agenda. However, we can't get away from the fact that it's hard to do. Frequently, time and resource pressures, L&D teams' preference to focus on learning design, and challenges in the availability of data undermine effective impact tracking. However, just because it's difficult doesn't mean it can be sidelined.

A key shift is embracing the fact that learning impact measurement can't just be a post-intervention activity. Effective learning requires evidence-gathering and needs definition to underpin decisions in design and delivery. Impactful learning journeys are underpinned by evidence from start to finish.

In most organisations, data isn't an issue; in fact, many departments can be overwhelmed by the insights available within their systems. So, learning practitioners must have a laser-like focus on what needs to be measured and who owns relevant data. Proactive and effective 'data owner' stakeholder engagement is essential. Successful impact tracking is a matter of excellent relationships ... and statistics.

Top recommendations:

- **Define the desired performance outcome and work back.** Effective impact measurement involves gathering relevant business and operational data, insights and shifts.
- **Engage key stakeholders.** It's vital that learners reflect on learning transfer in their work and managers are involved in observation and reporting. Negotiate time and resources for these activities.
- **Gather and report both qualitative (numbers) and quantitative (narrative) evidence.** Don't underestimate the powerful effect of 'stories' in informing impact in the learning journey.

Andy Lancaster, Head of Learning, CIPD

For more on how to make evidence-based decisions, see the CIPD's paper *[In search of the best available evidence](#)*, which provides valuable insights as to how key decisions in people management can be more evidence-based; read the CIPD's *[Evidence-based practice for effective decision-making](#)* factsheet; and listen to our podcast, *[Evidence-based L&D - 'Why does evidence matter?'](#)*

## 9 Conclusions and recommendations

Last year was a demanding one for organisations and people professionals alike. Within learning and development (L&D), the overnight shift to remote working during the pandemic resulted in sudden and sweeping changes to how L&D teams support organisational learning. There is a high probability that there will be no return to business-as-usual post-crisis; the pandemic has likely changed for good the distribution of work between the regular workplace and home for many workers.

The survey finds that while the COVID-19 pandemic has placed pressure on learning investment and resources, it has also challenged organisations and learning and development practitioners to: step outside of their comfort zone; be curious; and embrace new ways of delivering learning with high impact for the digital age. Organisations are investing in and innovating with learning technologies, seeking greater alignment between learning and need, and increasingly looking to demonstrate value. They are recognising the critical importance of relationships and connection in the digital era; connection via face-to-face events may have decreased, but the last year has seen a wider organisation collaboration.

As work continues to be disrupted, having visibility of where the skills gaps are and how to tackle them will be central to organisational success. However, while skilling and reskilling are high on organisational agendas, questions remain about whether learning professionals are equipped to respond, with the survey highlighting an ongoing need to evolve the skills and roles of the learning function. There is also more to be done to harness the power of data, not just to demonstrate impact but to define the performance need and shape solutions.

Drawing on the practical insights provided, we make the following recommendations:

**Build back better:** Now is the time for senior leaders and L&D professionals to reflect on what has worked well in the past year, and what can be adapted to ensure success in the changing world of work. Practitioners should reflect on lessons learned through the COVID-19 pandemic. With rapid changes to learning delivery and strategy, consider what has worked well and what could be improved upon.

**Embrace digital innovation:** While investment in learning has decreased this year, conversely, spend on learning technology has increased. So how do we best plan this investment and make sure we deliver the best value for the organisation? Successful approaches start with defining your learning technology strategy in line with your learning strategy. Target your investment and be clear on the business case. Start small, pilot and experiment before scaling up.

**Co-create organisational value:** The past year created a unique climate where often siloed functions are now working together to help the organisation respond rapidly to change. This has created a significant opportunity for business leaders and learning leaders to collaborate in solving critical business challenges:

- **Learning leaders** invest in skills to support performance consulting to build better understanding of root causes.
- **Business leaders should demand more than a course;** instead, expect your learning professionals to bring their expertise to solve business challenges.
- **Break down siloes:** leverage internal and external data to improve individual, team and organisational learning.

**Harness the wider learning environment:** Relationships and human connectivity are even more crucial in the digital era. To maintain a sense of connection we must be purposeful in building relationships and connections across the whole organisation. At an organisation level, this means having a clear and common agreement about the role of the line manager in L&D provision, at team level making connections with existing knowledge and collaborating with peers to drive performance, and on an individual level supporting and encouraging them to apply their learning.

**Be future-focused:** Addressing future skills needs/reskilling is high on the agenda, but often organisations lack clarity over the skills to target and how to agilely deliver to ever evolving skills needs. This is often seen as a complex and daunting area and L&D practitioners need to recognise that they cannot go on this journey alone:

- **Understand the skills and capabilities** that will be required by the future organisation and the transition states along that journey.
- **Make a plan to build the future skills** – develop the plan to build the future skills and capabilities, considering hiring, new skilling and redeployment.
- **Put new skilling in your people’s hands** – encourage continual learning and create clear learning pathways and career choices towards future skills your people and your organisation need.

**Evidence-based decisions:** If we’re serious about learning impacting performance, the measurement of its efficacy must be at the top of the learning team agenda. Effective learning requires evidence-gathering in needs definition and to underpin decisions in design and delivery. Impactful learning journeys are underpinned by evidence from start to finish:

- **Define the desired performance outcome and work back.** Effective impact measurement involves gathering relevant business and operational data, insights and shifts.
- **Engage key stakeholders.** It’s vital that learners reflect on learning transfer in their work and managers are involved in observation and reporting. Negotiate time and resources for these activities.
- **Gather and report both qualitative (numbers) and quantitative (narrative) evidence.** Don’t underestimate the powerful effect of ‘stories’ in informing impact in the learning journey.

## 10 Methodology

This is the CIPD’s *Learning and Skills at Work* survey, in partnership with Accenture (previously known as the annual CIPD L&D survey). It examines current practices and trends within learning and development.

The survey consisted of 38 questions completed through an online questionnaire. The sample was collected via a YouGov panel, as well as marketed to learning and development professionals through the CIPD’s network to provide supplementary insights. The survey field work was conducted in February 2021. In total, 1,219 people responded to the survey; results figures have been weighted and are representative.

Case study interviews were carried out with seven organisations. Full details of their L&D response to the pandemic are contained in the companion set of [case studies](#) to this report.

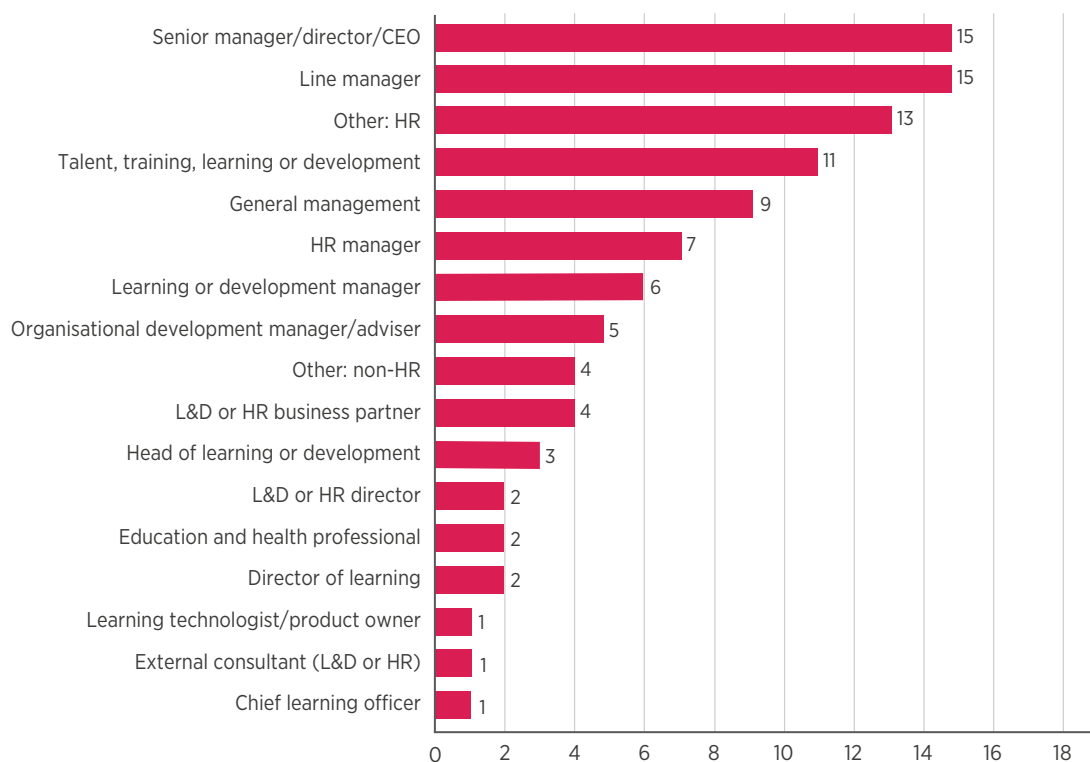


### Sample profile

The survey was targeted at people in HR/learning and development or in senior roles as the questions require specific knowledge on learning and development practices and policy. Over half (56%) report they are responsible for, or involved in, determining the learning and development needs of their organisation. Figure 36 shows a broad spectrum of respondents, with over half (55%) coming from either an HR or L&D background, while 15% are line managers, 9% general managers and 15% are senior managers or directors.

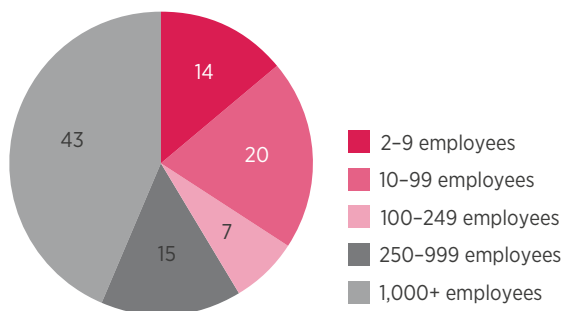
Respondents work for organisations of all sizes (Figure 37). Three-quarters work in the private services sector, just under a fifth in the public sector (18%), with the remaining 7% working in the voluntary and charitable sector (Figure 38).

**Figure 36: Sample characteristics: role of respondents (%)**



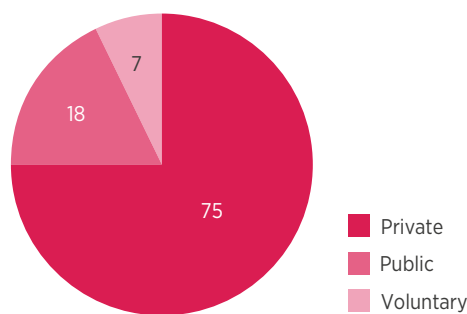
Base: all respondents: 1,219.

**Figure 37: Sample characteristics – size of organisation (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

Figure 38: Sample characteristics – broad sector (%)



Base: all respondents: 1,219.

## 11 Notes

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- 15 CIPD. (2020) *People profession survey 2020 UK and Ireland*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- 16 Cited in WorldSkills UK. (2021) *Disconnected? Exploring the digital skills gap*. London: WorldSkills UK.
- 17 See Blackwell, M., Daly, J. and Lancaster, A. (2019) *Professionalising learning and development: the CIPD's new Profession Map and key L&D development needs*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Pugh, C., Lewis, R., Yarker, J. and Green, M. (2021) *Impact of COVID-19 on the L&D profession: perspectives from independent learning practitioners*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- 18 Towards Maturity. (2018) *How to build and change habits in the workplace*. London: Towards Maturity.
- 19 CIPD Profession Map – Core behaviour: Insights focused.



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