MindTools®
FOR BUSINESS

Perform. Manage. Lead
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Learning and development in organizations

Reflecting on 20 years of research

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Annual L&D Benchmark Report 2023: **Part One of Three**

Contents

We have been collecting data about what works in learning and development for over two decades. In that time, we have spoken to more than 11,000 organizations, 67,000 employees, and 1,300 senior executives, and have published 70+ research reports. Because our data collection spans 83 countries, 22 industries, and represents small, medium, large, and multi-national organizations, we possess one of the largest, independent learning and development data pools in the world. **Underpinning our research is our ambition and goal of a multi-level understanding of organizational learning that leads to positive business impact.**

Insights Team
Mind Tools for Business

① Introduction

For the past 20 years, Mind Tools for Business have been collecting data from L&D leaders, business leaders and employees, to help us to understand more about organizational learning.

One of the main ways we do this is through our Learning Performance Benchmark[1], in which hundreds of L&D leaders take part each year to measure their organizations' performance on the global L&D market. The activity is a reflective process, which encourages leaders to pause and think about what they've achieved, their priorities, the behaviors they've engaged with, and the challenges they've faced in the last 12 months. By doing so, a staggering 97% of participants say that they generate new ideas to advance their learning strategies.

To mark 20 years of benchmarking, this year we will publish our traditional Annual L&D Benchmarking report in three parts. Because we are advocates of reflection, we're starting with a report that looks back over the journey we've shared together as an L&D industry. Where did we excel? How could we have done better? And, importantly, what can the past teach us about the future of organizational learning? The second and third reports will focus on where L&D is today and where it's heading, respectively.

In this report, though, we'll begin by exploring how learning maturity has evolved since we published our first report in 2004. To understand what a mature learning organization looks like, the report will identify what L&D teams were doing differently when the Organizational Learning Index peaked for the first time in 2017, before plummeting just three years later at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Later in the report, we'll discuss how organizations have responded to big changes over the years, and why L&D hasn't quite managed to keep up with significant advances in technology. The final chapter will focus on an example of missed opportunity and, importantly, how not to miss such opportunities in future. The report will concentrate on lessons to learn, rather than just identifying behaviors to mimic from higher-performing teams. This will help L&D teams to build stronger, more resilient learning strategies that serve the future of organizational learning.
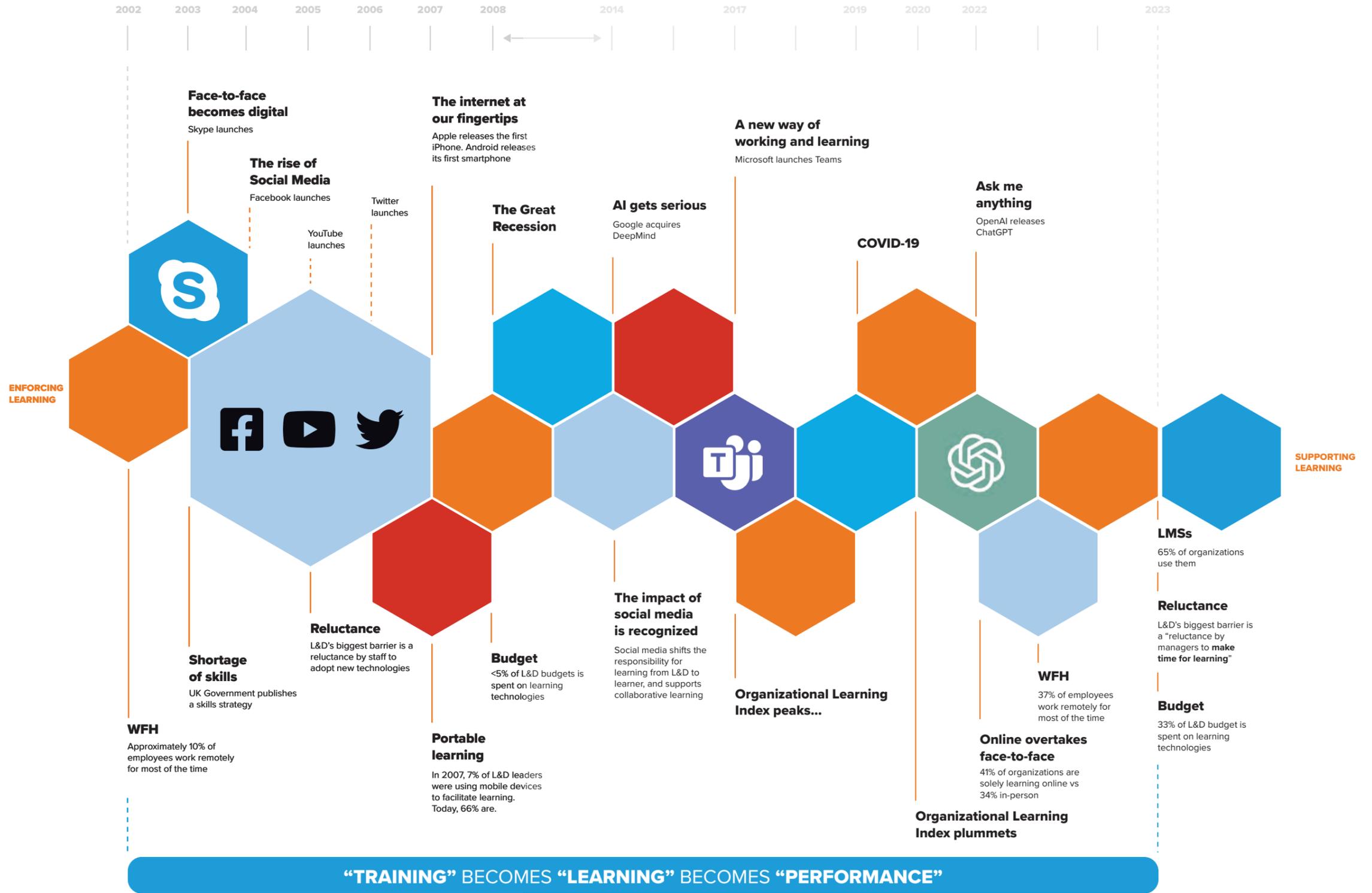
> *Because we are advocates of reflection, we're starting with a report that looks back over the journey we've shared together as an L&D industry.*

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[1] To find out more about the Learning Performance Benchmark, or to take part, visit: **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/solutions/learning-performance-benchmark**

20 years of learning: a timeline

Here we have summarized some of the key events that have occurred in the last 20 years. In the top half of the timeline we show some of the global milestones that have had an impact on L&D in that time, like the rise of social media and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the bottom half of the timeline we have summarized some of the insights that we'll explore in this report, like the increasing popularity of online-only learning and L&D's shift in focus from "training" to "performance".

2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008   2014   2017   2019 2020 2022   2023

Face-to-face becomes digital
Skype launches

The rise of Social Media
Facebook launches

YouTube launches

Twitter launches

The internet at our fingertips
Apple releases the first iPhone. Android releases its first smartphone

The Great Recession

AI gets serious
Google acquires DeepMind

A new way of working and learning
Microsoft launches Teams

COVID-19

Ask me anything
OpenAI releases ChatGPT

ENFORCING LEARNING

SUPPORTING LEARNING

LMSs
65% of organizations use them

WFH
Approximately 10% of employees work remotely for most of the time

Shortage of skills
UK Government publishes a skills strategy

Reluctance
L&D's biggest barrier is a reluctance by staff to adopt new technologies

Portable learning
In 2007, 7% of L&D leaders were using mobile devices to facilitate learning. Today, 66% are.

Budget
<5% of L&D budgets is **spent** on learning **technologies**

The impact of social media is recognized
Social media shifts the responsibility for learning from L&D to learner, and supports collaborative learning

Organizational Learning Index peaks...

Online overtakes face-to-face
41% of organizations are solely learning online vs 34% in-person

Organizational Learning Index plummets

WFH
37% of employees work remotely for most of the time

Reluctance
L&D's biggest barrier is a "reluctance by managers to **make time for learning**"

Budget
33% of L&D budget is spent on learning technologies

"TRAINING" BECOMES "LEARNING" BECOMES "PERFORMANCE"

3

20 years of a benchmarking: a reflection

In 2003, the Learning Performance Benchmark (formally the Towards Maturity Benchmark) was created. To celebrate 20 years of benchmarking, we sat down with its original founder, Laura Overton, to reflect on the journey the benchmark has been on in that time.

"In today's economic climate business challenges include speed of change, quality, customer retention, revenue, growth and cost reduction"

This was the first line of "Linking Learning to Business", the first research report that I wrote back in 2003. The hype around digital learning claimed that it would meet these needs and yet, at the time, 60% of projects were failing. I had two questions in mind – why are some more successful than others and what were the business factors that contribute to digital success?

That first study 20 years ago kick-started a unique research collaboration. Guarding independence fiercely, the study grew and developed. It involved trusted industry experts, academics, practitioners, and suppliers from around the globe. It continually deconstructed, tested, and monitored trends, models, and sentiments, and tested them for their links back to business impact.

Over the years thousands of learning leaders and workers have used the questions to reflect. Governments, professional bodies, and institutes have used the findings to inform direction. Practitioners and suppliers have leaned into the discoveries year by year as they have mapped out their journey towards improving business impact, towards learning maturity.

Today 97% of participants say that just taking part in the Learning Performance Benchmark generates new ideas to advance their learning strategies. Over the years the tools, technologies, approaches, and even language that we use to describe workplace learning have all changed, but the essence of what we discovered in those early days, the six foundations underpinning success (and the core of the current index) continue to guide.

"Supporting decisions that count through research that matters" was a phrase that summed up our approach. When I read this at the head office of Mind Tools for Business, I knew that we had found a home for the benchmark. I am grateful that this home continues to create a trusted source of independent evidence 20 years on.

Our economic climate continues to change, L&D continues to need to make decisions that count, and this research continues to matter.

So don't just **read** these insightful reports celebrating 20 years of independent industry research. Be **curious** and **explore** the findings. You are standing on the shoulders of community giants who have contributed, crafted and enhanced this study over 20 years. **Trust** that you will find a nugget of insight that has the power to unlock the potential of L&D in your organization and have the courage to **apply** it.

Laura Overton

Original founder of the Towards Maturity Benchmark and CEO of Learning Changemakers

④

Learning maturity over the years

What can we learn from our triumphs and challenges?

In this chapter, we'll unpack what the past has taught us about learning maturity. We'll start with an overview of the Organizational Learning Index (OLI), which we have been using to reliably track the health of learning and development, globally, for 13 years. We'll reflect on why organizations in 2017 were getting things right, and how reactions to unexpected challenges had damaging consequences in 2020.
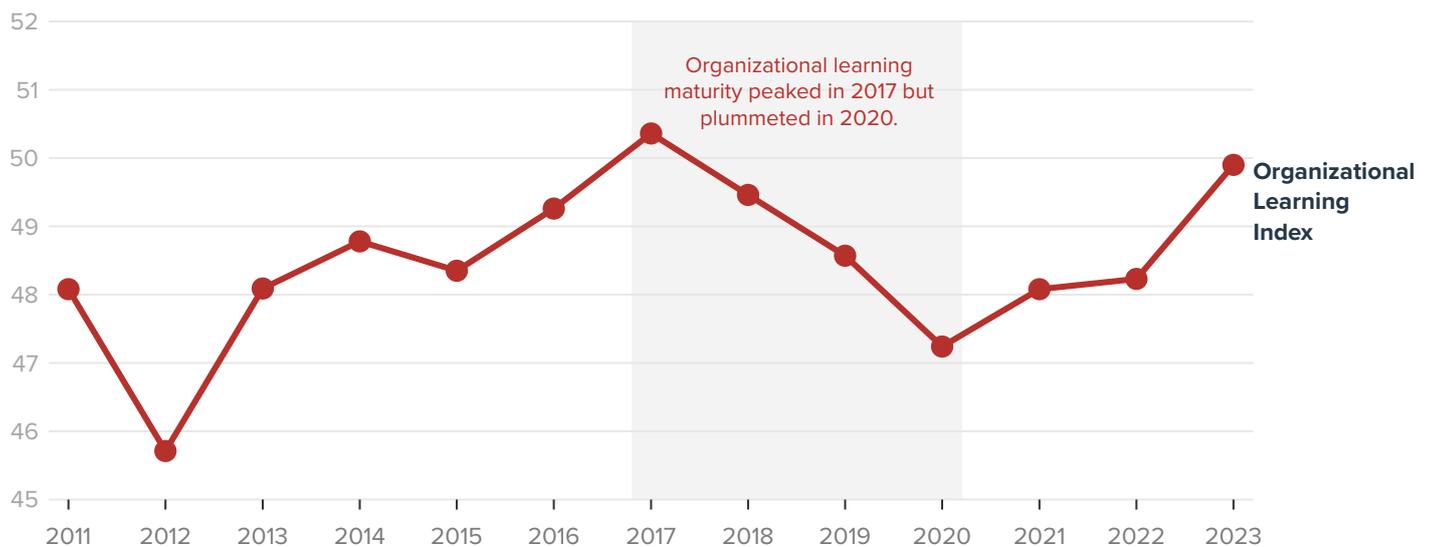
Background to the Organizational Learning Index

To understand the health of learning and development across organizations, in 2010 we created the OLI. At that time, we had already collected 7 years' worth of data from hundreds of L&D leaders (today, we've collected data from more than 11,000), which we used to inform the design of our model.

We measure and aggregate key strategic behaviors through our Learning Performance Benchmark[2]. This produces a single number (or score) for each organization that takes part. This score ranges from 0 (i.e., organizations are carrying out none of the key behaviors) to 100 (i.e., organizations are carrying out all of the key behaviors), and is strongly correlated with measures of organizational growth, transformation, productivity, and profitability (or sustainability for the not-for-profit sector). For context, top-performing teams with a higher OLI are two to three times more likely to report a reduction in employee turnover, an increase in organizational productivity and an increase in organizational revenue.

In **Figure 1**, we show how the OLI has changed over the last 13 years. In its infancy, the OLI dipped between 2011 and 2012, but recovered quickly in 2013. After that, we observed small but steady improvements to learning maturity across all organizations – the industry, so to speak, was getting better. By the time we reached 2017, the OLI peaked for the first time. But in the following three years, many of the gains organizations had made up to 2017 were lost. In 2018, for example, organizations were achieving an average of 11.02 goals, but, by 2020, this number had dropped to 8.62. Since 2020, the average number of goals achieved each year has steadily increased to 11.23 in 2023, mirroring the pattern of the OLI in that time. In the next section, we'll concentrate on this period of recent history to identify why organizations in 2017 were different from organizations in 2020.

Figure 1. Organizational Learning Index – 2011 to 2023

Organizational learning maturity peaked in 2017 but plummeted in 2020.

Organizational Learning Index

Note: The Organizational Learning Index tracks the health and impact of learning and development in organizations. We measure and aggregate key strategic behaviors to produce a single number that ranges from 0 to 100, with 0 meaning the organization is doing nothing in terms of key strategic behaviors and 100 meaning the organization is carrying out all the key strategic behaviors. It is strongly correlated with measures of organizational growth, transformation, productivity, and profitability (or sustainability).
Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight •Source: Learning Performance Benchmark 2011 – 2023
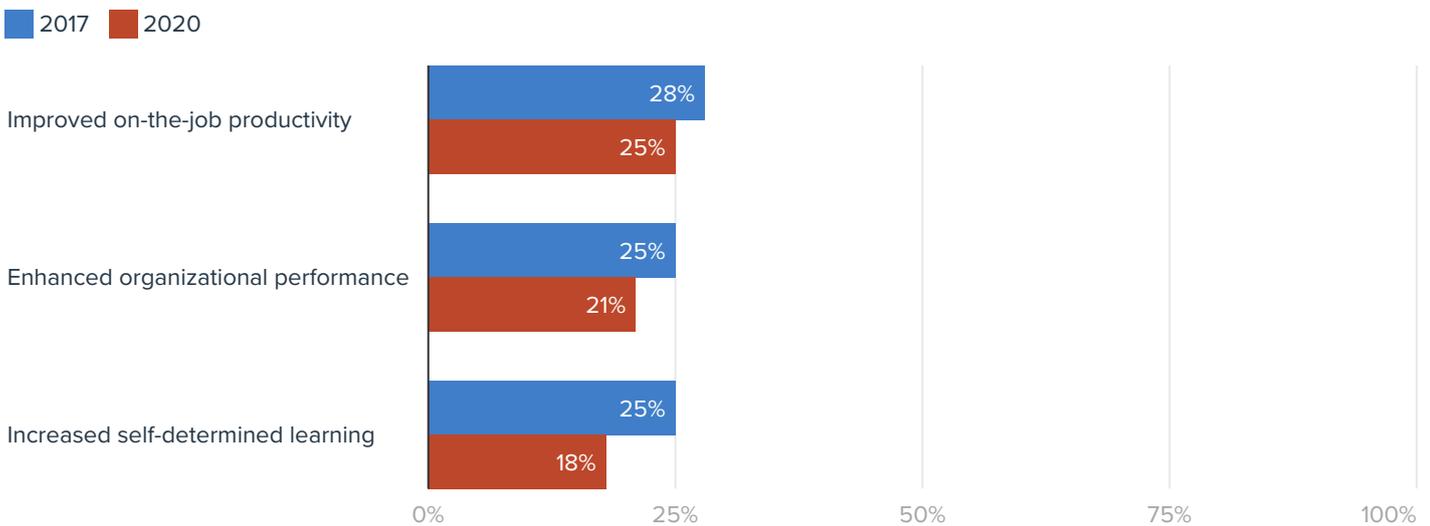
Markers of maturity

Success as an L&D team is not about what you're doing, but *why* you're doing it. It's about making decisions that are evidence-led and grounded in purpose, being able to adapt to meet the needs of the business, and having an openness to experiment with new ideas. There's no set of behaviors that one L&D team can transfer to another, but there are lessons they can learn. This is why we encourage L&D leaders to benchmark their learning strategy each year, so that they can continually learn from other, higher-performing teams.

In this section, we'll benchmark longitudinally, so that we can understand what L&D teams were doing and why when the OLI peaked for the first time in 2017, and then fell in 2020. Although the difference in index appears trivial, the impact was significant. Compared with 2020, more L&D teams in 2017 reported increases in productivity, organizational performance, and learner self-determination **(see Figure 2)**.

Figure 2. Proportion of organizations achieving key goals in 2017 and 2020

Compared with 2020, more L&D teams in 2017 reported increases in productivity, organizational performance, and learner self-determination.

■ 2017　■ 2020

	2017	2020
Improved on-the-job productivity	28%	25%
Enhanced organizational performance	25%	21%
Increased self-determined learning	25%	18%

Note: Percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders that reported achieving each goal. Whilst the differences reported here appear small, they are consistent with the proportion of organizations that achieve the 34 goals we monitor as part of data collection each year (which typically ranges between 20% and 30%). In 2023, for example, 23% of L&D leaders, on average, reported that they had achieved each goal.
Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insights • Source: Leaning Performance Benchmark 2017 and 2020

Below we have identified two areas where organizations were achieving more in 2017 than in other years, and where top-performing teams continue to excel. Broadly speaking, these areas are related to **L&D team capabilities** and **budget**, but the take-home messages are much bigger than that. In each section, we'll study **what** Top Performers do differently and, most importantly, **why** they do it.

1. L&D team capabilities

Organizations in 2017 were more likely to have coaching capabilities in house, and to be prioritizing collaborative learning than organizations in 2023, whether deliberately or not.

What: coaching capabilities increased in 2017

Over the last 20 years, coaching has moved from the fringe of personal development to a central part of the L&D strategy. Each year, coaching and mentoring capabilities are strong markers of top-performing teams. More than 8 out of 10 of these organizations have them, making them the fifth most common capability top performers have in house (for all other organizations, they're tenth). And, importantly, research shows that developing coaches internally is more effective than outsourcing for them.[3]

Crucially though, the number of L&D teams that have coaching and mentoring capabilities has reduced in recent years. In 2017, when organizational learning maturity peaked, 63% of organizations said that they had these skills. Today, just 43% do **(see Figure 3)**.

Figure 3. Coaching and collaboration L&D skills – 2017 to 2023

Since 2017, the number of organizations with coaching capabilities in house has declined. Although the number of organizations with the capability to facilitate collaboration hasn't changed much in that time, in 2017, organizations were 1.4 times more likely to be prioritizing it than they are today.
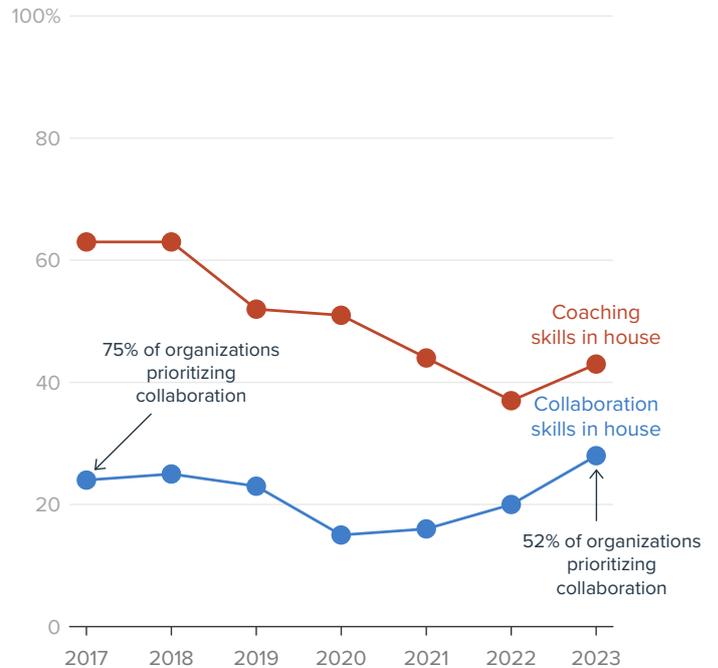
Note: Percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders that report having the above capabilities in house. For collaboration skills, the graph also includes the percentage of L&D leaders that reported each capability as being a "priority" in 2017 and 2023.
Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insights • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark 2017 to 2023

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[3] Jones, R. J., Woods, S. A. and Guillaume, Y. R. F. (2015) 'The effectiveness of workplace coaching: a meta-analysis of learning and performance outcomes from coaching', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89(2), pp. 249–277. **https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12119**

Why: top-performing organizations don't follow fads

The number of organizations with coaching capabilities in-house in 2017 appears to correlate with a rise in the popularity of coaching as an L&D practice.[4] Until around 2015, there was a reported lack of scientific research examining the learning-related benefits of coaching for organizations.[5] But by 2017, conferences like CIPD's Learning and Development Show were dedicating full streams to workplace coaching, and the Training Industry website (which hosts a comprehensive collection of L&D resources online) reported that their top 10 articles for the year included those about training managers to be coaches and the "coaching revolution".[6] Even in our own study, which has been intentionally designed to evolve with the industry, it wasn't until 2016 that coaching was given a permanent place on our "capabilities to track" list.

It seems that one skill of a top-performing team is knowing how to detach fads from trends. They strike the balance between consistency and flexibility, and don't drop concepts or behaviors because new ideas or "quick fixes" gain traction. To successfully embed coaching in the learning culture is a significant project that requires time and effort. It involves engaging stakeholders on every level, upskilling managers and employees, and a lot of practice – it isn't rolled out in months but developed over years.

The drop in the number of organizations with coaching capabilities in-house between 2017 and 2023, though, could be reflective of an industry-wide shift in focus and a tendency by less mature L&D teams to follow the latest fad. In 2016, for example, Deloitte listed coaching as one of nine characteristics that could "reshape the role of L&D organizations" in the future.[7] By 2019, Deloitte were talking about the emergence of learning experience platforms (LXPs) as being the "latest and possibly most pervasive trend" for learning.[8] Every year new ideas and technologies appear in the L&D market, and it's the challenge of L&D professionals to consider which are worth pursuing and, crucially, how they'll see them through.

What: collaboration was a top priority in 2017

In contrast to coaching capabilities, having the skills in place to facilitate social and collaborative learning hasn't changed much since 2017, but priorities in this space have. In 2017, collaboration was the number one skill L&D teams wanted to develop. Today, only half of L&D leaders prioritize it, despite fewer than one-third of L&D teams possessing collaboration as a capability. Like coaching, collaborative learning is a vital skill for high-impact L&D teams in 2023. We found that top performers who are achieving the most in areas related to collaboration (like strengthening teamwork and improving knowledge sharing, see **Figure 4**) are twice as likely to have these skills than organizations in stages 1 to 3 of our maturity model.

Figure 4. Top performers achieve more goals related to collaboration

Below we show some of the differences between top-performing organizations and the benchmark for 2023. The achievements included in this graph are all related to collaboration, either directly or indirectly, and show that top performers are around three times more likely to be strengthening communication, enhancing knowledge sharing, increasing self-determined learning, and improving employee wellbeing.

	2023 Benchmark	Top performers	Difference (multiples)
Directly related to collaboration			
Strengthened communication and teamwork	19%	50%	2.6
Enhanced the ongoing sharing of knowledge	23%	68%	3.0
Indirectly related to collaboration			
Increased self-determined learning	21%	64%	3.0
Strengthened employee wellbeing	22%	61%	2.8

Note: The variables shown above are among 34 organizational goals we monitor as part of our data collection. The percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders reporting that they have achieved the above goals in 2023. Direct achievements are organizational goals that are intrinsically linked with an increase in collaboration. Indirect achievements are organizational goals that are associated with an increase in collaboration, for examaple, research by Fey, Nordbäck, Ehrnrooth, and Mikkonen (2022) found that peer coaching (a form of collaboration in practice) was associated with an increase in employee proactivity and wellbeing. See: **doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100864**
Table: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark 2023

[4] LinkedIn (2015) *7 ways coaching has become L&D mainstream: 2003 vs 2015*, Available at: **https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-ways-coaching-has-advanced-2003-v-2015-ian/** (Accessed 12 May 2023) [5] Jones, R. J., Woods, S. A. and Guillaume, Y. R. F. (2015) 'The effectiveness of workplace coaching: a meta-analysis of learning and performance outcomes from coaching', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89(2), pp. 249–277. **https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12119** [6] *Training Industry (2017)* Top 10 articles of 2017, Available at: **https://trainingindustry.com/articles/professional-development/top-10-articles-of-2017/** (Accessed 17 May 2023) [7] See figure 3. Deloitte Insights (2016) *Learning: Employees take charge,* Available at: **https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2016/fostering-culture-of-learning-for-employees.html** (Accessed 8 May 2023) [8] Deloitte Insights (2019) *Learning in the flow of life: 2019 Global Human Capital Trends*, Available at: **https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2019/reskilling-upskilling-the-future-of-learning-and-development.html** (Accessed 8 May 2023)

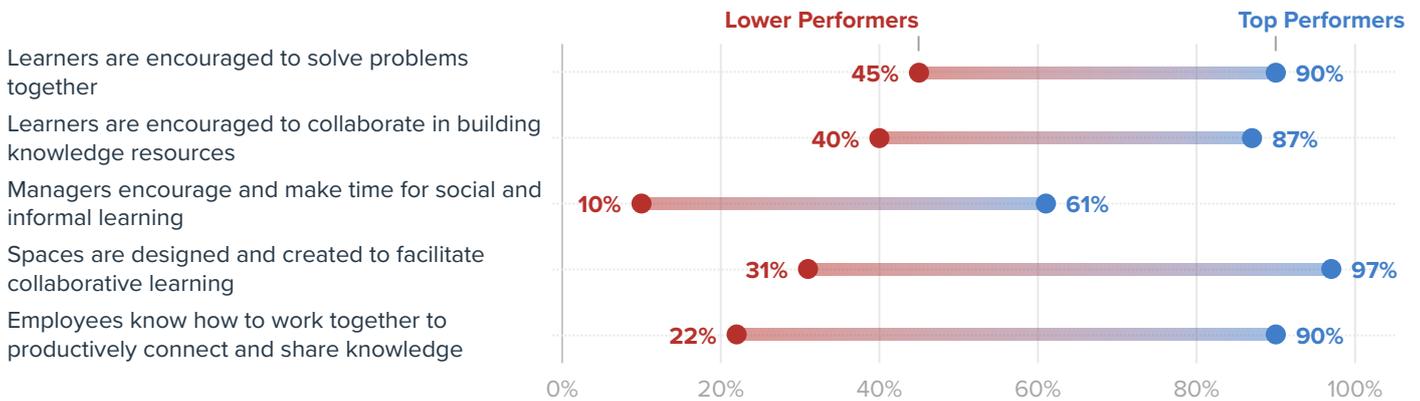## Why: top-performing organizations combine capabilities for maximum impact

We can see that coaching and collaboration are essential components of a successful L&D strategy by looking at the behaviors and priorities of top-performing organizations. Whilst important in their own right, research shows that combining coaching and collaboration to develop and encourage peer coaching is an effective way of improving learning in the workplace.[9] Peer coaching involves two or more colleagues of a similar level working together to develop new skills, share ideas and knowledge, reflect on current practices, and address shared challenges and issues. In academic research, peer coaching is associated with an increase in employee proactivity, self-awareness, psychological safety, and wellbeing.[10, 11]

In 2017, when the OLI peaked, some behaviors related to peer coaching soared. Compared with 2016, for example, organizations in 2017 were almost eight times more likely to be encouraging peer-to-peer feedback to support continuous improvement. Today, top-performing organizations greatly outshine the rest in this space (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Behaviors related to peer coaching in 2023

Top-performing organizations are significantly more likely to engage in behaviors that support peer coaching, compared with lower-performing organizations in our benchmark for 2023.

	Lower Performers	Top Performers
Learners are encouraged to solve problems together	45%	90%
Learners are encouraged to collaborate in building knowledge resources	40%	87%
Managers encourage and make time for social and informal learning	10%	61%
Spaces are designed and created to facilitate collaborative learning	31%	97%
Employees know how to work together to productively connect and share knowledge	22%	90%

Note: Percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders that reported a score of 7, 8, or 9 from a scale of 1–9, with 1 being "we don't do this at all" to 9 being "we do this all the time".
Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insights • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark 2023

> *"Our industry loves to work in siloes – isolating content creation, design, social learning, and coaching. Top performers flex and adapt, and they consistently show that they combine the best of what is needed to address the business opportunity at hand."*

Laura Overton
Original founder of the Towards Maturity Benchmark and CEO of Learning Changemakers

[9] Ladyshewsky, R. K. (2017) 'Peer coaching as a strategy to increase learning and development in organisational life – a perspective', *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1), pp. 4-10. Available at: **https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/26da9f5c-0271-439c-8437-2fa7afe5823d/1/** (Accessed: 20 April 2023) [10] Ibid [11] Fey, N., Nordbäck, E., Ehrnrooth, M., and Mikkonen, K. (2022) 'How peer coaching fosters employee proactivity and well-being within a self-managing Finnish digital engineering company', *Organizational Dynamics*, 51(3), pp. 1-13. **https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100864**

2. Budget

What: L&D teams had a healthier budget in 2017

In 2017, organizations were spending £681 per employee on learning and development. In 2020, when the index dropped, organizations were spending £639.[12] Today, budget per employee is around £705 but, in real terms, L&D teams are working with a lot less (around £131 per employee) than they were seven years ago.[13]

Although budget per employee is a crude indicator of how invested in learning organizations are, it tells us nothing about how and where L&D teams are spending their money. In 2017, 22% of L&D budget was spent on learning technologies – a proportion that didn't change much until 2021. Today, one-third of L&D budget is spent on technology.
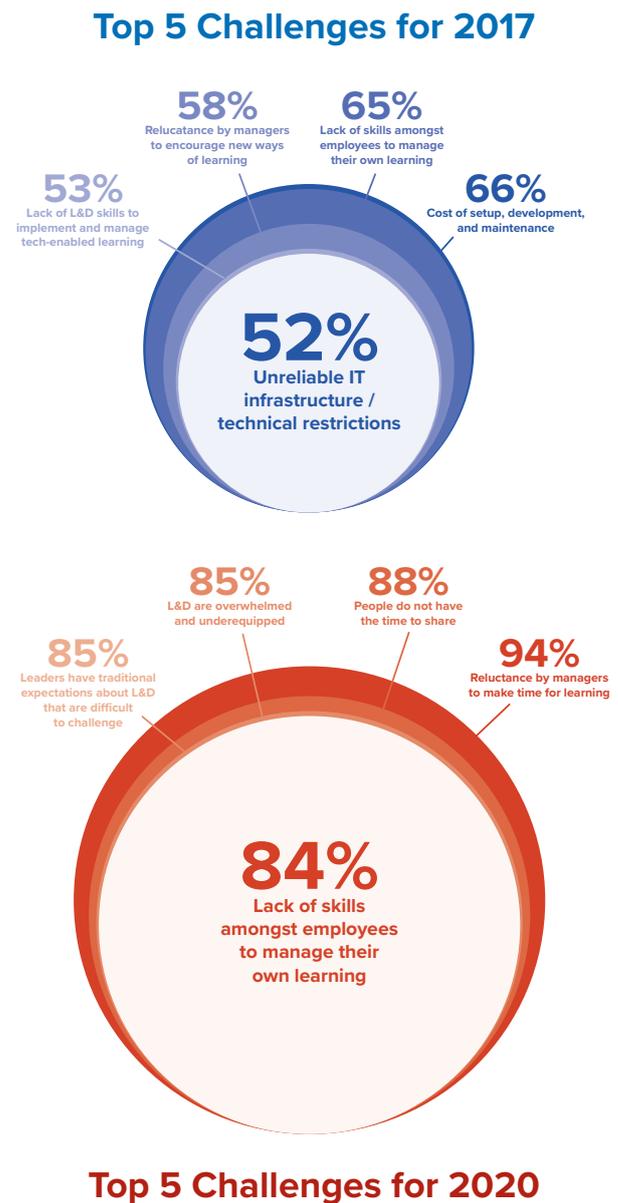
Why: top-performing organizations have evolved to be able to do more with less

Contrary to expectation, each year we see that technology doesn't predict success. In fact, in 2022, we found that top-performing organizations were investing the least in learning technologies and still achieving the most. In that same report, we concluded that top-performing organizations were making wiser decisions that were cost-effective in the long term. For them, it was less about having the latest gadgets, and more about what the business needed and could manage, considering its priorities and capabilities.

So why does a healthier budget set 2017 organizations apart if it doesn't directly predict success? Data from top-performing teams tells us that it's not all about money. But budget can tell us something about how much organizations value and prioritize learning. By comparing the challenges organizations faced in 2017 with those they faced in 2020 (see **Figure 6**), we see that barriers shifted from those related to the practicalities of learning (such as having the skills, money, and IT to support it) to those related to culture (such as managerial reluctance, feeling overwhelmed as an L&D team, and battling traditional expectations from the top).

Figure 6. Top five L&D challenges for 2017 and 2020

In 2017, L&D leaders were more concerned about practical barriers to learning (like cost, skills, and IT infrastructure). In 2020, concerns shifted to those related to culture (like a reluctance by managers to make time for learning).

Top 5 Challenges for 2017

58% Relucatance by managers to encourage new ways of learning
65% Lack of skills amongst employees to manage their own learning
53% Lack of L&D skills to implement and manage tech-enabled learning
66% Cost of setup, development, and maintenance
52% Unreliable IT infrastructure / technical restrictions

85% L&D are overwhelmed and underequipped
88% People do not have the time to share
85% Leaders have traditional expectations about L&D that are difficult to challenge
94% Reluctance by managers to make time for learning
84% Lack of skills amongst employees to manage their own learning

Top 5 Challenges for 2020

Note: Percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders who considered the above challenges as a barrier to learning in their organizations. Above, we show the top 5 challenges for 2017 and 2020. In 2017, L&D leaders were asked to tick the challenges they considered to be a barrier. In 2020, L&D leaders were asked to rate how concerned they were about each challenge on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "not at all concerned" to "extremely concerned". Here, we show the percentage of L&D leaders who reported being "concerned" or "extremely concerned" about each challenge.

[12] In our 2020 Annual L&D Benchmark report, budget per head was calculated in USD. The average USD to GBP exchange rate for 2020 was 0.78, which we have used to calculate how much organizations were paying in GBP. [13] Taking inflation into account, organizations in 2023 would need to be spending an average of £836 per employee to match what they were spending in 2017.

There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the OLI fell at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – a clear illustration of how strongly environments can predict success. At that time, most L&D teams were focusing on the immediate practicalities of learning at work in a new and remote environment, such as encouraging the use of social media (which increased by 7% between 2017 and 2020), equipping line managers with resources (which increased by 10%) and ensuring that learning and development was discussed with employees during performance reviews (which increased by 37%).

Whilst important, these aren't the behaviors that lead directly to transformation, innovation, and growth – which is precisely what business leaders wanted from their L&D teams at that time.[14] In fact, in isolation, some of these behaviors can have damaging consequences for learning cultures. For instance, encouraging the use of social media is necessary only if the organization already has the tools and resources in place to support social learning online. But in our research, we found that nine in ten L&D leaders don't know how their employees use social media to learn at work, which means that in 2020 they were intentionally encouraging its use without understanding its impact or effectiveness.

Instead, the top-performing organizations in 2020 were the ones responding quickly and effectively to meet the needs of the business, experimenting with new ideas, improving learner self-directedness, and checking that the skills they had in-house were suitable for what their organizations required. These are the behaviors which most other organizations failed to prioritize (see **Figure 7**).

COVID-19 taught us something about how L&D teams perform in the face of unexpected challenges. For most, their actions were counter-intuitive – for example, auditing skills less often in an unstable environment, or encouraging the use of social media without knowing how employees used it.

For many years, most organizations have been in stage 1 of our maturity model,[15] which means that they're having surface-only impact and focusing primarily on transactional interventions. It's a reactive approach to learning that restricts many organizations from achieving key goals, such as increasing innovation, building capabilities, and future-proofing the business. These are some of the goals that were achieved the least by L&D teams in 2020. But it's not for lack of trying. Like top-performing organizations in stage 4 of our model, organizations in stage 1 tend to do more than organizations in stages 2 or 3 (for more on this, see part 2 of this report series[16]). The difference is that organizations in stage 1 struggle to do things in synergy and with purpose. They're also the least likely to strategically align their activity with the business. Which means that when challenges occur, they're ill-equipped to respond in a way that's flexible, agile, and considers the long-term vision and impact.
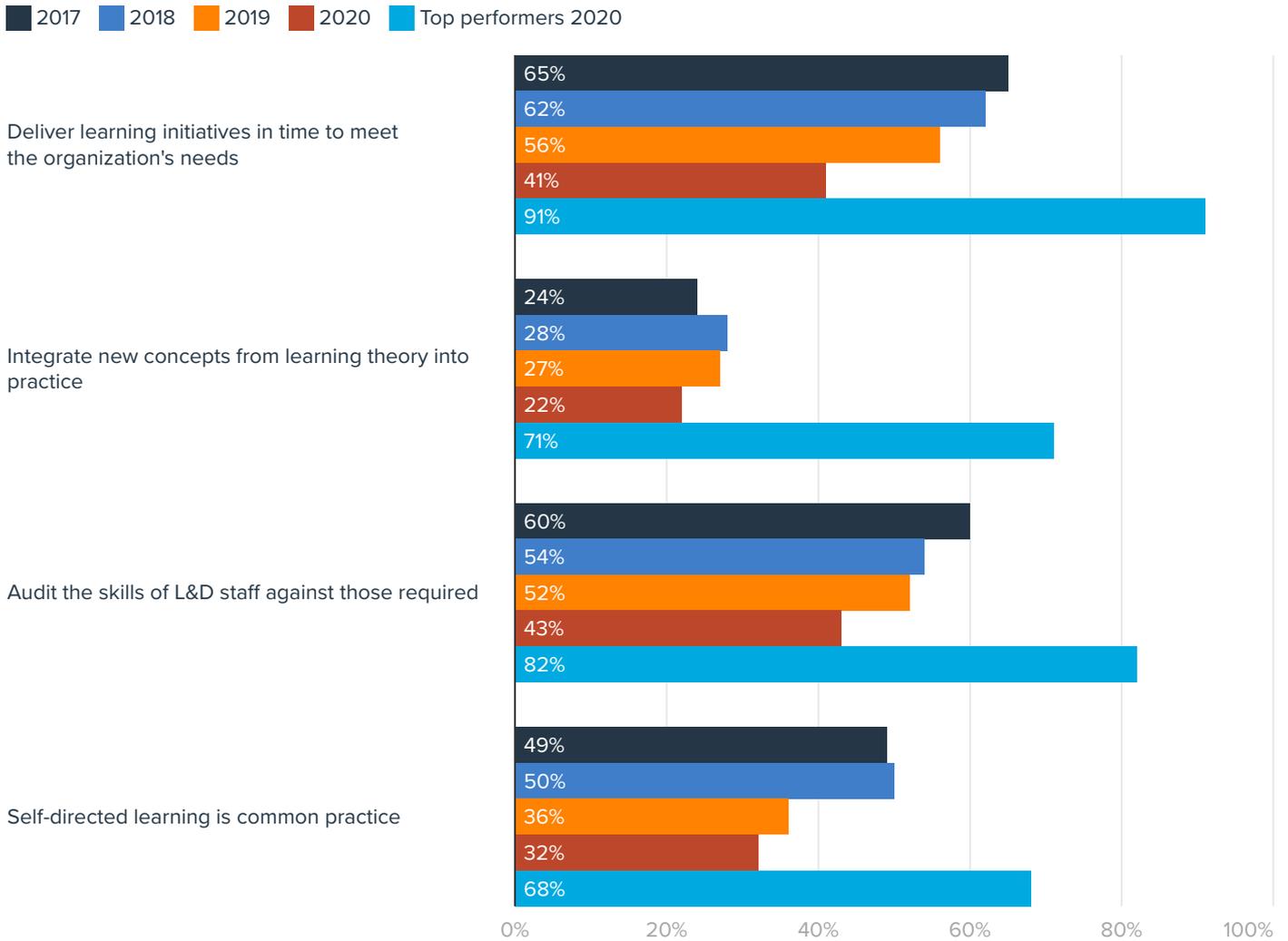
Business alignment has been an important topic since we started this study 20 years ago. In our first research report, we found that L&D success (particularly in the online learning space) was achieved and sustained when learning strategies could adapt and change in response to the business climate.[17] We monitor six areas as part of our data collection: strategic and business alignment, employee motivation, environment, talent and culture, L&D team capabilities, organizational engagement, and learning impact. **Strategic and business alignment** is consistently the area where top-performing teams achieve the most. In 2020, for example, 94% of these organizations ensured that their L&D teams' activities were fully aligned with the strategic goals of the business. For all other organizations in our model, the proportion was less than 50%.

[14] In 2021, business leaders reported that they wanted L&D to focus on organizational performance, transformation, innovation, and growth. For details, see our 2021 Leadership Report: **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/resources/blog/same-team-different-sides-leadership-report-2021** [15] Including this year, where 51% of organizations are in stage 1 of our maturity model. [16] To celebrate 20 years of benchmarking, this year Mind Tools for Business will be publishing our Annual L&D Benchmark report in three parts. This report (part one) will look back and reflect on the journey we've shared as an L&D industry over the last 20 years. Part two will focus on the data we have collected from L&D leaders in 2023 to understand the current state of organizational learning. And part three will consider what the future of organizational learning looks like. [17] Mind Tools for Business (2004) *Annual L&D Benchmark report: Linking learning to business*, Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/linking-learning-to-business** (Accessed 23 March 2023)

Figure 7. Behaviors that reduced between 2017 and 2020

In 2020, most organizations were engaging less in behaviors that lead to transformation.

Legend: ■ 2017 ■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ Top performers 2020

Deliver learning initiatives in time to meet the organization's needs
- 2017: 65%
- 2018: 62%
- 2019: 56%
- 2020: 41%
- Top performers 2020: 91%

Integrate new concepts from learning theory into practice
- 2017: 24%
- 2018: 28%
- 2019: 27%
- 2020: 22%
- Top performers 2020: 71%

Audit the skills of L&D staff against those required
- 2017: 60%
- 2018: 54%
- 2019: 52%
- 2020: 43%
- Top performers 2020: 82%

Self-directed learning is common practice
- 2017: 49%
- 2018: 50%
- 2019: 36%
- 2020: 32%
- Top performers 2020: 68%

Note: The percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders that report a score of 7, 8 or 9 out of a scale of 1–9, with 1 being "we don't do this at all" and 9 being "we do this all the time".
Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Mind Tools Learning Performance Benchmark 2017 and 2020

What have we learned?

When learning maturity peaked in 2017, organizations were spending more on L&D. Whilst budget doesn't directly predict success, it does reflect how supported L&D felt at that time. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, L&D teams were battling managers who were reluctant to make time for learning, and business leaders with traditional expectations about it. Unlike top-performing organizations, who are consistently achieving the most with the least, many L&D teams in 2020 were struggling with tighter budgets than they were in 2017 – and with it, a lack of perceived support from the wider organization.

Organizations can learn a lot from top performers. When the industry was doing its best in 2017, more organizations were prioritizing collaboration and coaching skills than in the years that followed. These capabilities have been markers of learning maturity for the past 20 years. Today, top-performing organizations are more likely to have coaching capabilities in-house and the skills to facilitate social and collaborative learning than organizations in the lower stages of our maturity model.

In 2020, most L&D teams prioritized the immediate practicalities of learning in a new environment, but top-performing teams evolved to adapt. They were the ones thinking about how they could remain aligned to the business' goals despite the circumstances. They audited the skills of their staff against those required and ensured that learning initiatives were delivered in time to meet the needs of the business.

5

The lag between technology and L&D

Since we started our benchmarking study in 2003, technology has progressed at an unprecedented rate. It's long been considered that technology is a gateway to organizational success, but throughout the years of our research, we've found that technology only supports businesses to achieve goals. For success, technology is less important than learning leaders who have vision, intent, and curiosity. It's the parts that make us human that give L&D the edge, which even the very best artificial intelligence can't imitate.

In the previous chapter, we learned that top-performing teams don't follow trends blindly, but make smarter decisions that are cost effective in the long term. Each year new technologies emerge in the L&D marketplace, each of which has the potential to be either another fad or a transformative investment. It's the weighty responsibility of L&D teams to identify which are right for their organizations.

Although technology isn't the solution, it is an extremely powerful tool that can take organizational learning to new heights – but only if organizations first take the time to consider why they're using it. In this chapter, we'll explore how L&D teams have used technologies over the years to support their learning strategies, efforts, and initiatives, and why L&D teams have so far struggled to keep up with the speed of digitalization.
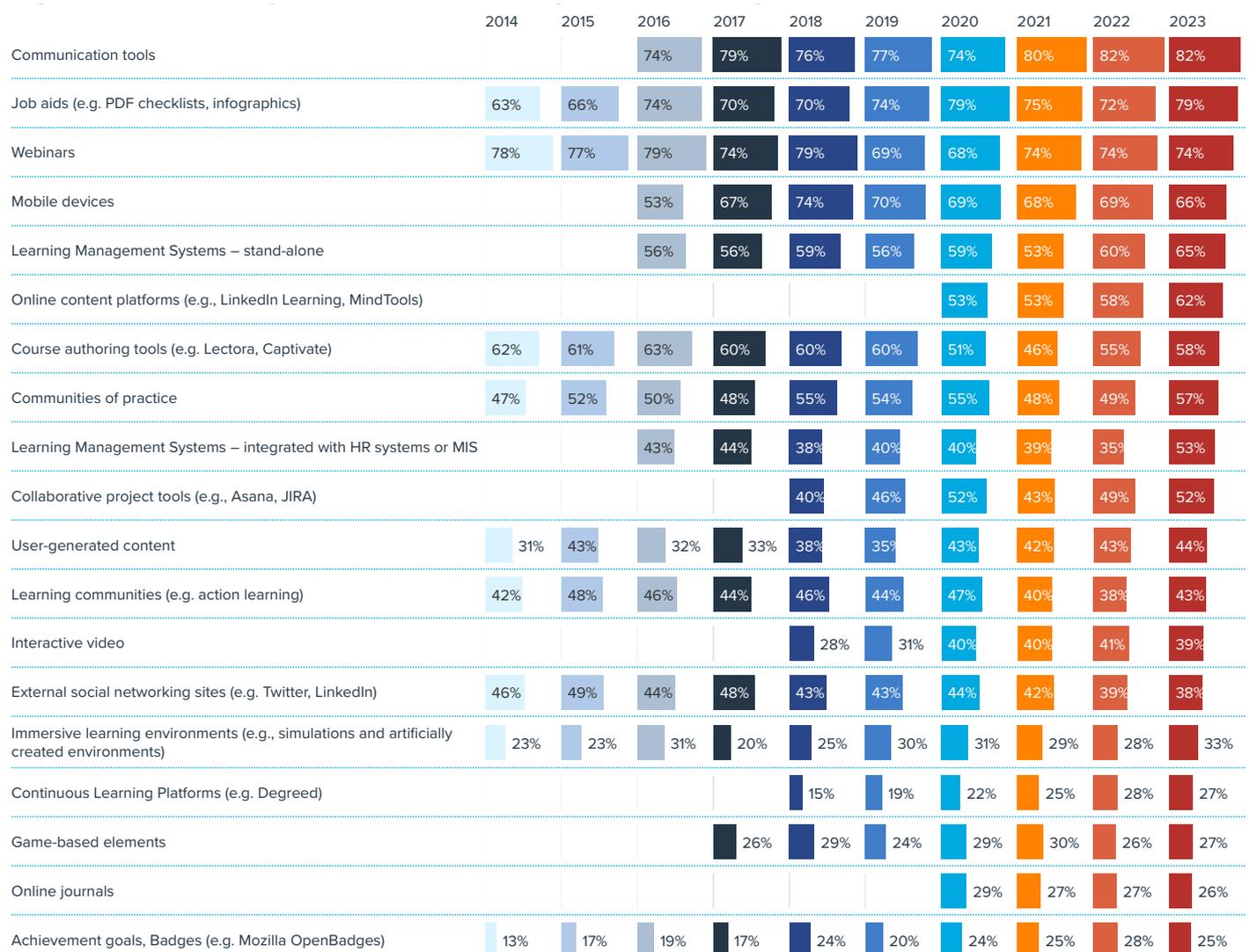
> " *It's the parts that make us human that give L&D the edge, which even the very best artificial intelligence can't imitate."*

The popularity of learning technologies over the years

For the past decade, we've been monitoring the popularity of technology-enabled learning in the workplace. Today, we have a growing list of 31 technologies that we track. For a significant number of these technologies (84%), frequency of use hasn't changed much over the years. For example, webinar tools, job aids, and learning communities are still as popular today as they were in 2014. Some of the newer technologies (such as smartwatches, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence) haven't yet taken off, but we have observed an increase in the number of organizations using virtual classrooms, internal social networking sites, open education resources and courses, and sharing apps (see **Figures 8a, 8b, and 8c**).

Today, the most popular technologies L&D teams use for learning are file and presentation sharing applications like SharePoint and Google Docs (91%), communication tools (82%), and internal social networking sites (81%). Interestingly, whilst internal social networking has increased in the last 10 years (and most significantly so in the past 12 months), the use of external social networking sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn has declined, from 46% of L&D teams using them in 2014, to 38% in 2023.
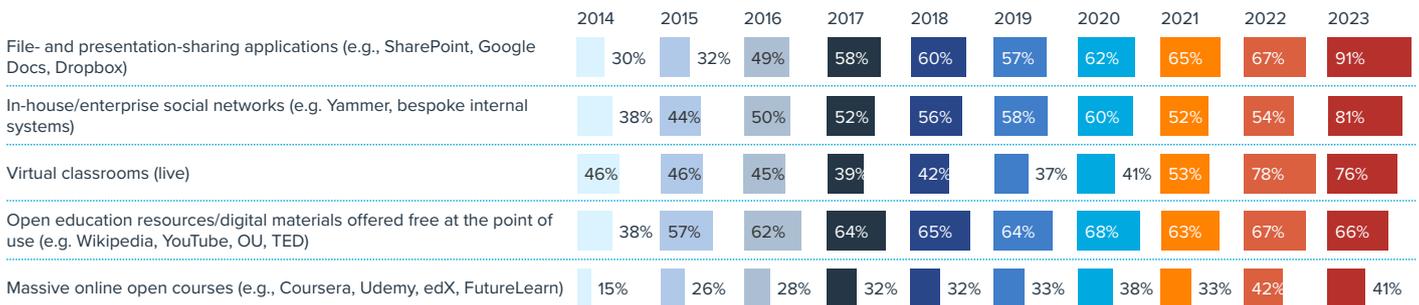
Figure 8a. Technologies that have remained unchanged in popularity – 2014 to 2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Communication tools			74%	79%	76%	77%	74%	80%	82%	82%
Job aids (e.g. PDF checklists, infographics)	63%	66%	74%	70%	70%	74%	79%	75%	72%	79%
Webinars	78%	77%	79%	74%	79%	69%	68%	74%	74%	74%
Mobile devices			53%	67%	74%	70%	69%	68%	69%	66%
Learning Management Systems – stand-alone			56%	56%	59%	56%	59%	53%	60%	65%
Online content platforms (e.g., LinkedIn Learning, MindTools)							53%	53%	58%	62%
Course authoring tools (e.g. Lectora, Captivate)	62%	61%	63%	60%	60%	60%	51%	46%	55%	58%
Communities of practice	47%	52%	50%	48%	55%	54%	55%	48%	49%	57%
Learning Management Systems – integrated with HR systems or MIS			43%	44%	38%	40%	40%	39%	35%	53%
Collaborative project tools (e.g., Asana, JIRA)					40%	46%	52%	43%	49%	52%
User-generated content	31%	43%	32%	33%	38%	35%	43%	42%	43%	44%
Learning communities (e.g. action learning)	42%	48%	46%	44%	46%	44%	47%	40%	38%	43%
Interactive video					28%	31%	40%	40%	41%	39%
External social networking sites (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn)	46%	49%	44%	48%	43%	43%	44%	42%	39%	38%
Immersive learning environments (e.g., simulations and artificially created environments)	23%	23%	31%	20%	25%	30%	31%	29%	28%	33%
Continuous Learning Platforms (e.g. Degreed)					15%	19%	22%	25%	28%	27%
Game-based elements				26%	29%	24%	29%	30%	26%	27%
Online journals							29%	27%	27%	26%
Achievement goals, Badges (e.g. Mozilla OpenBadges)	13%	17%	19%	17%	24%	20%	24%	25%	28%	25%

Note: The percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders reporting that they are using or experimenting with the above technologies. Where there is no data for a given year, it means that we were not collecting responses on that particular technology at that point.

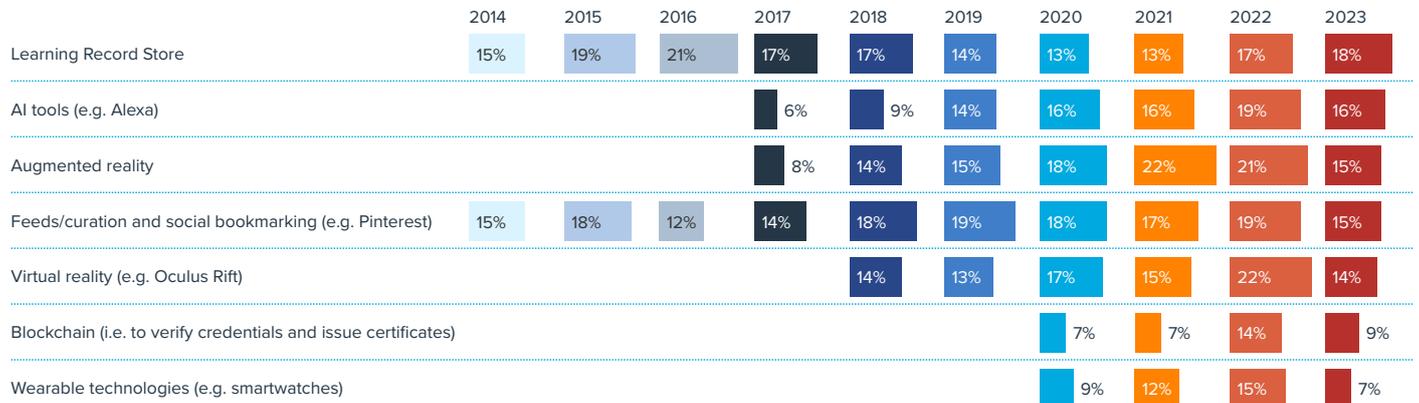Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark

Figure 8b. Technologies that have increased in popularity – 2014 to 2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
File- and presentation-sharing applications (e.g., SharePoint, Google Docs, Dropbox)	30%	32%	49%	58%	60%	57%	62%	65%	67%	91%
In-house/enterprise social networks (e.g. Yammer, bespoke internal systems)	38%	44%	50%	52%	56%	58%	60%	52%	54%	81%
Virtual classrooms (live)	46%	46%	45%	39%	42%	37%	41%	53%	78%	76%
Open education resources/digital materials offered free at the point of use (e.g. Wikipedia, YouTube, OU, TED)	38%	57%	62%	64%	65%	64%	68%	63%	67%	66%
Massive online open courses (e.g., Coursera, Udemy, edX, FutureLearn)	15%	26%	28%	32%	32%	33%	38%	33%	42%	41%

Note: The percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders reporting that they are using or experimenting with the above technologies.

Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark

Figure 8c. Technologies that haven't taken off – 2014 to 2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Learning Record Store	15%	19%	21%	17%	17%	14%	13%	13%	17%	18%
AI tools (e.g. Alexa)				6%	9%	14%	16%	16%	19%	16%
Augmented reality				8%	14%	15%	18%	22%	21%	15%
Feeds/curation and social bookmarking (e.g. Pinterest)	15%	18%	12%	14%	18%	19%	18%	17%	19%	15%
Virtual reality (e.g. Oculus Rift)					14%	13%	17%	15%	22%	14%
Blockchain (i.e. to verify credentials and issue certificates)							7%	7%	14%	9%
Wearable technologies (e.g. smartwatches)							9%	12%	15%	7%

Note: The percentages refer to the number of L&D leaders reporting that they are using or experimenting with the above technologies. Where there is no data for a given year, it means that we were not collecting responses on that particular technology at that point. Although AI tools are included in the above list, the data for 2023 was collected prior to the release of ChatGPT.

Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark

Why L&D have struggled to keep up

Skype launched in 2003, the same year we started collecting data about organizational learning.[18] It wasn't necessary for L&D to reinvent the wheel right away, but with each milestone in technology (including the rise of social media, the launch of the first smartphone, and the development of LMSs), we expected to see steady but bold changes to the way learning occurred at work. As we've seen in the previous section, however, the use of external social media platforms like Twitter, mobile devices, and LMSs hasn't changed much in recent years. In 2014, our data predicted that the use of mobile devices for learning would increase to 78% by 2015.[19] But, even today, it's never reached that figure.

Learning has changed. We're not the same L&D industry we were 20 years ago, and employees are not the same learners. In 2004, employees were described as stakeholders who "participate in learning" so that they can "apply knowledge and improve performance".[20] Today's learner is no longer seen as a passive participant, but one who takes ownership of their learning and the process. In a sense, L&D is moving from being a function that enforces learning to a function that supports it.

Whilst things have evolved, it's taking a long time for L&D to catch up (note that we're using the present tense here, because there's still work to be done). For example, only in 2022 did the number of organizations learning online overtake the number of organizations learning face-to-face for the first time, despite more than one-third of all employees now working remotely for most of the time (see **Figure 9**). We aren't the only ones who expected to see greater change than we have done so far. Each year, most L&D leaders predict that online and blended learning will increase at a much higher rate than it typically does. In 2022, for example, 57% of L&D leaders reported that blended learning would increase in the next 24 months. In 2023, the number of organizations learning via a blend of online and face-to-face methods reduced by 2%.

What's causing the lag? Certainly, there's a cultural issue related to reluctance. Since 2019, the number one barrier for L&D teams has been a reluctance by managers to make time for learning. But way back in 2004, L&D leaders were also reporting that their biggest challenge was a reluctance by staff to adopt new technologies. For as long as we've been collecting data, it seems that L&D teams have been battling cultures that are reluctant to facilitate and foster learning. Part of the problem, however, is that L&D teams have so far struggled to successfully engage key stakeholders in the business. Each year and on average, only half of L&D teams report having "stakeholder engagement" as an in-house capability, one in five say that stakeholders share the same vision for learning, and just 38% (which, at its peak, only reached 44% in 2017) have a communication plan in place for business leaders, managers, and employees.

However, the data also shows us that L&D aren't leveraging enough online learning opportunities. For the last 20 years, traditional in-person methods of learning delivery, such as classroom, have been the number one capability L&D teams have in-house. It makes sense that capabilities are slow to change. Classroom delivery, for example, has been used and needed by organizations for a long time. Until an entirely new workforce pushes up through the ranks, skills in this space aren't just going to disappear. The concern, though, is that they're not even reducing to make way for other, higher-priority skills. In 2023, L&D leaders told us they desperately needed the capabilities to measure impact, to analyze and interpret learning data, and to facilitate social and collaborative learning, but that these skills consistently sat at the bottom of the pile, with fewer than 28% of organizations having them, but more than 52% needing them.

> *"The transition from enforcing to supporting learning has been a gradual process for L&D, requiring courage, experimentation, and a long-term view. By drawing upon practices identified in this benchmark and looking to successful early adopters, L&D professionals can embrace a new, higher leverage role - bringing learning closer to work and equipping the workforce with essential learning skills, behaviours and resources."*
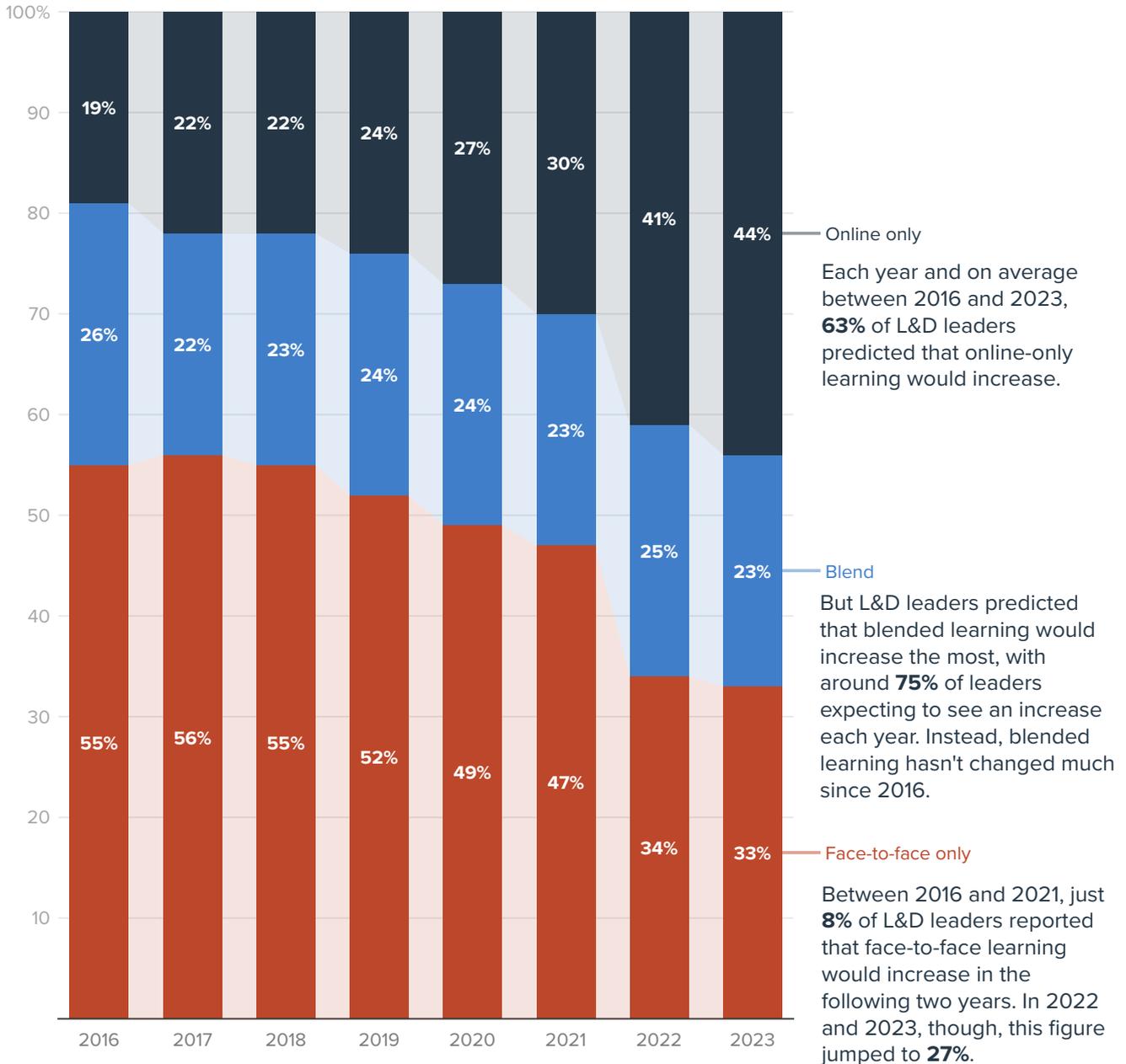
Michelle Ockers
Founder & Chief Learning Strategist, Learning Uncut

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[18] Felstead, A., and Henseke, G. (2017) 'Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance', *New Technology, Work and Employment,* 32(3), pp. 195-212. **https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12097** [19] Mind Tools for Business (2014) *Mobile learning at work,* Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/mobile-learning-at-work-2014** (Accessed 20 March 2023) [20] Mind Tools for Business (2004) *Annual L&D Benchmark report: Linking learning to business,* Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/linking-learning-to-business** (Accessed 23 March 2023)

Figure 9. How learning delivery has changed over the years

In 2022, the number of organizations learning online overtook the number of organizations learning face-to-face for the first time since we started collecting data about learning delivery in 2016.


Online only

Each year and on average between 2016 and 2023, **63%** of L&D leaders predicted that online-only learning would increase.

Blend

But L&D leaders predicted that blended learning would increase the most, with around **75%** of leaders expecting to see an increase each year. Instead, blended learning hasn't changed much since 2016.

Face-to-face only

Between 2016 and 2021, just **8%** of L&D leaders reported that face-to-face learning would increase in the following two years. In 2022 and 2023, though, this figure jumped to **27%**.

Note: In the graph, we show the yearly estimates L&D leaders made about the proportion of learning that happens face-to-face, online, or via a blend in their organizations. The same L&D leaders were then asked to indicate whether they expected the usage of each method to increase, decrease, or stay the same in the next two years. On the right, we show how many L&D leaders reported that each method would increase on average and for each year. Because L&D leaders could choose more than one method to increase, percentages do not add up to 100%. Chart: Mind Tools for Business Insight • Source: Learning Performance Benchmark 2016 – 2023

The second concern is that traditional classroom models do not adequately support the modern learner. Over the last couple of decades, the most stable pattern to emerge is that employees prefer accessing learning resources at the point of need.[21] But an overreliance on traditional classroom models has left L&D out of touch with those that matter the most: their employees. We'll return to this topic in the next chapter, where we'll talk more about the challenge of engaging learners in a digital world, and how it's not too late for L&D to use technology to their advantage.

[21] Mind Tools for Business (2022) *Learner Intelligence report: Engaging with learning in the reimagined workplace*, Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/learner-intelligence-report-2022** (Accessed 28 March 2023)

Figure 10. Number of L&D teams that have each capability in house in 2023, according to their stage of maturity
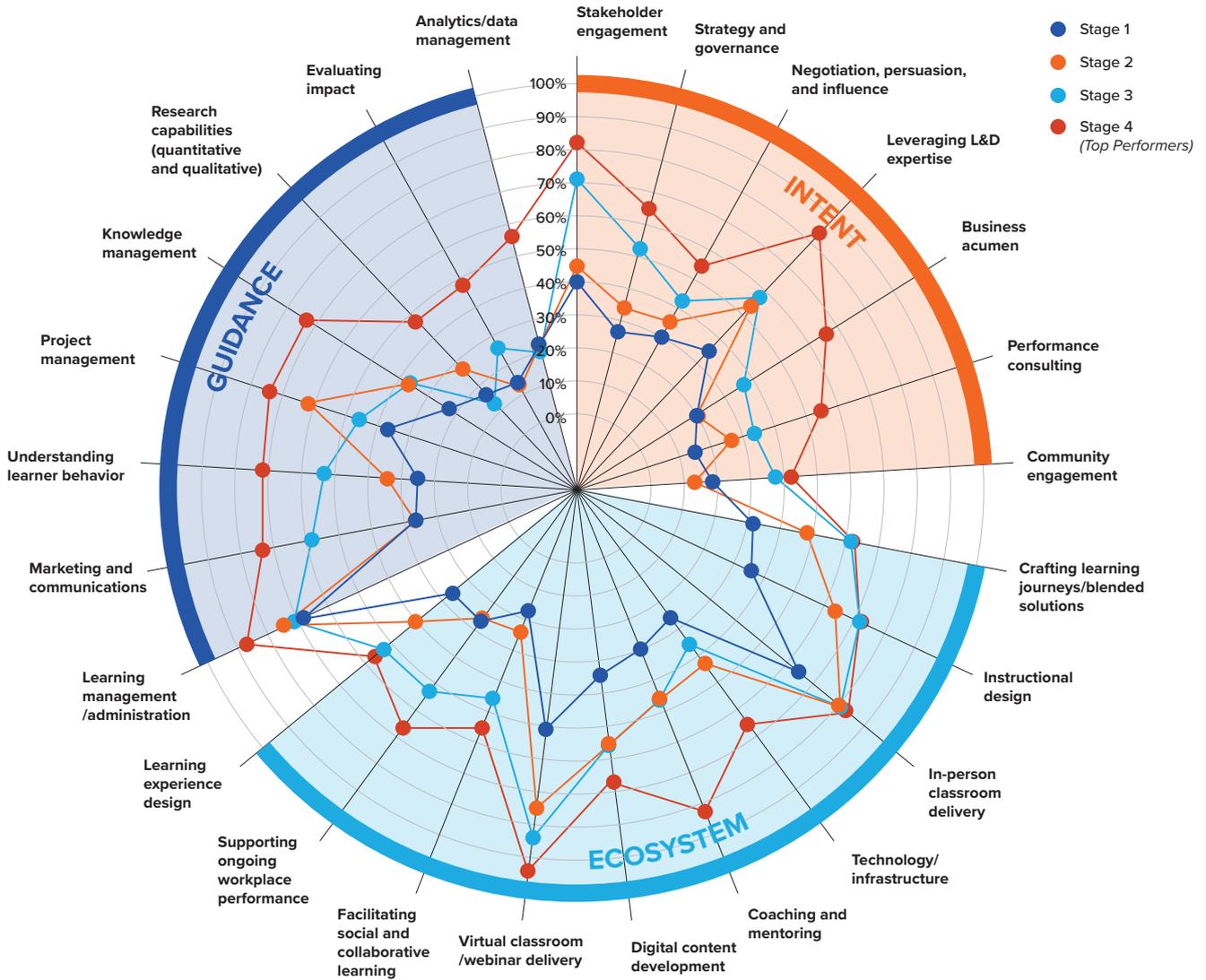
To explore how L&D capabilities have changed in recent years, please use the links below (or QR codes, if using mobile) to interact with the data we've collected from L&D leaders since 2017. Each link categorizes the data based on one of three types of skills L&D need to lead with purpose, facilitate and embed learning into the organization's culture, and deliver learning to the business.

1. Lead with purpose:

SCAN ME

VISIT URL

2. Facilitate and embed learning into the organization's culture:

SCAN ME

VISIT URL

3. Deliver learning to the business:

SCAN ME

VISIT URL

What have we learned?

Technology is powerful, but the speed at which it's progressing can be overwhelming. Over the last 20 years, the use of technology hasn't changed much for most L&D teams. But L&D's role has changed. Today, the responsibility for learning largely sits in the hands of learners themselves (or at least, it should do), and L&D are responsible for supporting them through the process. But, so far, many L&D teams haven't managed to keep up. They're operating with outdated capabilities and solutions (like traditional classroom-based methods) and struggling to engage key stakeholders in the business.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for organizations in 2023 is knowing where to start. Technology has come a long way, so is it really possible to catch up now? In the next section of this report, we'll focus on one small, albeit mighty, cog in the big wheel of digital learning. And we'll consider how L&D teams can still transform organizational learning through technology, by meeting employees in the places they already occupy.

> *"It's no surprise that L&D's biggest battle and opportunity has been with technology. The industry and its somewhat overbearing parent in HR have had the unfortunate 'slow to adapt' tagline for far too long.*
>
> *Coincidentally, we face this same challenge now as the industry stares down the barrel of leveraging (or as past data has shown, perhaps not leveraging) generative AI and other intelligent AI tools in the learning process. As we are truly living in a digital world, we as modern L&D professionals need to accept that digital intelligence (the discipline of understanding how to use the latest technologies) is an essential part of our craft.*
>
> *It's clear from the research that the way to become a high-performing L&D organization is through unlocking the power of technology."*

Ross Stevenson
Learning and Performance Strategist at Steal These Thoughts

6

Social media: shifting the responsibility for learning from L&D to employee

At the start of this report, we explored some markers of top-performing L&D teams. When the industry was performing at its best in 2017, coaching capabilities were high and collaboration a priority. Organizations move from good to great when they stop isolating behaviors and start thinking about connectivity and the impact of actions. We've seen in Chapter One that coaching and collaboration can be a powerful combination, which L&D teams can support through the proper use of technologies like social media.

In the previous chapter, we found that the number of L&D teams using external social networking platforms (like Twitter, Discord, TikTok, and Reddit) to facilitate learning has reduced in recent years. This is despite social media providing organizations with fresh opportunities to make learning more relevant, accessible and collaborative. Below are some examples of how social media is currently being used by L&D teams in the workplace:

▶ **For new hires, live-streaming platforms like Facebook are used to share tours of offices, introduce key members of staff, and facilitate Q&A sessions.**

▶ **Hashtags built into sites like Twitter are used by L&D teams to help learners to find new and relevant content, to link conversations, and are used to share learning opportunities with colleagues.**

▶ **Group messaging platforms such as WhatsApp are used to help employees stay connected about topics they care about, courses they've participated in, or knowledge they'd like to share.**

▶ **Sites like LinkedIn are used to create private groups of learners who come together to share knowledge, ask questions, store resources, and talk about learning experiences.**

Most of these social networking sites also support communities of practice, where people come together to learn collectively about a shared topic or to collaborate on common problems. In 2015, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner defined communities of practice as having three main characteristics[22]:

1. A domain of shared interest,
2. A community of people who come together to engage, discuss, share, and support,
3. Practice, by practitioners who commit to the process and give their time.

Earlier in this report, we commented on the counter-intuitive decision that many L&D teams made in 2020 to encourage the use of social media without an awareness of how their employees use it. In Wenger-Trayner's brief introduction to communities of practice, they describe technology as being "as good as it is useful to the people who use it". Social media platforms are powerful, but L&D have a key role to play in cultivating online environments that learners get the most out of. It's for this reason that we have chosen to deep dive into the world of social media

in this chapter – and because only 24% of L&D leaders in 2023 report having the capabilities in-house to engage communities.

Is social media worth the hype?

Facebook launched in 2004. In the years that followed, the internet welcomed YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. More recently, TikTok emerged in 2017. Today, it's estimated that 4.5 billion people use social media, a number that has more than doubled since 2015.

From the data we collected from learners between 2017 and 2020, we found that social networking sites like YouTube, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp consistently took the lead as the most popular platforms for learning at work. As shown in **Figure 11**, significantly more employees are using social media to learn for personal reasons than they are for work. This suggests that, whilst employees see the value in using social media for learning, they are struggling to get the most out of these platforms in the workplace. Later this year, we'll speak to employees again to see how things have changed almost three years on, and to explore whether the popularity of different social sites is linked to how well organizations support online learners.
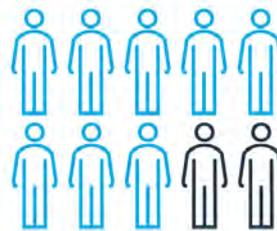
In more recent research, though, 8 in 10 employees say that they use social media at work and 79% of jobseekers report relying on it to find out about new opportunities.[24] But what impact does social media have on organizational learning?

Perhaps most importantly, social media makes learning more accessible. It's portable, multimodal, and available all the time. And when we spoke to employees in 2022, we found that having access to learning resources contributed toward making them more proactive learners – they were better at planning their learning, were more willing to experiment and take risks, and more likely to carve out the time to reflect on what they had learned.[25]

[22] Wegner-Trayner (2015) *Introduction to communities of practice: a brief overview of the concept and its uses*, Available at **https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/** (Accessed 9 May 2023) [23] Backlinko (2023) *Social network usage and growth statistics: How many people use social media in 2023?*, Available at **https://backlinko.com/social-media-users** (Accessed 10 May 2023) [24] Gitnux (2023) *The latest social media at work statistics 2023 you shouldn't ignore*, Available at **https://blog.gitnux.com/social-media-at-work-statistics/** (Accessed 10 May 2023) [25] See page 16. Mind Tools for Business (2022) *Learner Intelligence report: Engaging with learning in the reimagined workplace*, Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/learner-intelligence-report-2022** (Accessed 28 March 2023)

Figure 11. The popularity of social networking sites for work-related and personal learning: 2017–2020

	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	W	P	W	P	W	P	W	P
▶ YouTube	-	-	36%	71%	37%	72%	41%	83%
f Facebook	-	-	9%	36%	11%	42%	6%	36%
🐦 Twitter	7%	25%	9%	21%	15%	27%	6%	22%
in LinkedIn	34%	34%	41%	29%	36%	29%	34%	38%
📷 Instagram	5%	35%	3%	21%	3%	25%	2%	28%
👻 SnapChat	-	-	1%	11%	1%	10%	0%	11%
📌 Pinterest	3%	23%	3%	19%	4%	20%	2%	21%
⬤ Whatsapp	5%	23%	13%	30%	17%	34%	17%	10%

Note: Percentages refer to the number of employees that reported using the above social networking sites to support work-related learning (W) and personal learning (P). Sample sizes for each year are as follows: *n* = 9406 (2017), n = 2349 (2018), *n* = 5644 (2019), *n* = 1036 (2020).

Other research shows that, in a learning context, social media can have a positive effect in many areas. These include sharing knowledge and resources, exploring and interacting with colleagues, performance, engagement, and self-directedness.[26, 27, 28] Used properly, social media can be pivotal in developing new kinds of learning cultures, that promote collaboration and shift some of the responsibility for learning from L&D to employees.

Since the release of the first smartphone, the proportion of L&D leaders using mobile devices to facilitate learning has jumped from 7% in 2007 to 66% in 2023. Around the time when social media took off in 2004, L&D leaders reported that a "reluctance by staff to adopt new technologies" was the biggest challenge they faced. Today, most L&D leaders no longer consider this to be a barrier to learning. Instead, some of the challenges they share in 2023 are about understanding the full potential of social media in the workplace, and how it can be used to drive engagement with learning.

Missed opportunities to boost engagement

As the number of people using social media has increased over the last decade, so has the amount of time for which people engage with its content.[29] In 2012, users engaged for an average of 1 hour and 30 minutes every day. In 2022, engagement almost doubled to 2 hours and 45 minutes. The purpose of social media also now extends well beyond its original intention – to connect people all over the world – with recent research showing that users rely on it to acquire knowledge, including about topics like science and research.[30]

Engagement is an important idea for organizations that care about learning. In this year's Leadership Report, we found that 89% of business leaders expect their L&D teams to contribute towards improving employee engagement, but consistently only 1 in 4 organizations manage to achieve this each year.[31] Whilst social media has provided L&D with an opportunity to exploit, the number of L&D leaders who encourage its use at work has dropped from 56% in 2017 (when learning maturity peaked) to 30% in 2022. And, today, 86% of L&D leaders say that they don't know how their employees use social media to share knowledge and ideas.

> " *86% of L&D leaders say that they don't know how their employees use social media to share knowledge and ideas."*

[26] Ansari, J.A.N., and Khan, N.A. (2020) 'Exploring the role of social media in collaborative learning the new domain of learning', *Smart Learning Environments*, 7(9), pp. 1–16. **https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00118-7** [27] Daniels, K. N., and Billingsley, K. Y. (2014) "Facebook" – It's not just for pictures anymore: the impact of social media on cooperative learning', *i-manager's Journal of Educational Technology*, 11(3), pp. 34–44. **https://doi.org/10.26634/jet.11.3.3008** [28] McLoughlin, C., and Lee, M. (2008). 'Mapping the digital terrain: new media and social software as catalysts for pedagogical change', In R. Atkinson, & C. McBeath (Eds.), *Hello! Where are you in the landscape of educational technology?* pp. 641–652. Deakin University. Available at **https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/publications/mapping-the-digital-terrain-new-media-and-social-software-as-cata** (Accessed 11 May 2023) [29] Statista (2022) *Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2022*, Available at: **https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/** (Accessed 2 May 2023) [30] Hargittai, E., Füchslin, T., and Schäfer, M. S. (2018) 'How do young adults engage with science and research on social media? Some preliminary findings and an agenda for future research', *Social Media + Society*, 4(3), pp. 1–10 **https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118797720** [31] Mind Tools for Business (2023) *Leadership report: Turning pressures into opportunities*, Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/turning-pressures-into-opportunities** (Accessed 28 March 2023)

Case study: using social media to drive engagement and develop learner capabilities

In 2014, Blaschke published an academic research paper about Personal Learning Environments (PLEs), which was a relatively new concept at the time (research on this topic first emerged in 2005 but the concept didn't take off until around 2011).[32, 33] Personal Learning Environments are exactly what they sound like – a space that individuals create (with the support of their L&D teams and wider organizations) to manage their own learning experiences. The aim is for individuals to build a system that connects them to a range of services, resources, and communities to support their learning.

Rather than treating employees as information consumers, PLEs place most of the responsibility for learning in the hands of learners themselves. In doing so, they help learners to build key capabilities, like self-directedness, which are essential for developing continuous and sustainable learning cultures. The affordances of social media support this process by providing learners with on-demand resources and multimedial content to suit different learning approaches, and by connecting them with other, like-minded people.

In an online classroom setting, Blaschke explored how learners used social media to support their learning and, crucially, how effective it was. They found that social media platforms such as Diigo were used to share user-annotated online resources between colleagues, sites like Twitter were used to search for and discover content and to connect learners with subject matter experts, and mind-mapping platforms like Miro were used to consolidate, share, and track new ideas. Learners reported that by using social media, they had gained knowledge, were able to connect with other learners, and had opportunities to reflect on how they had learned.[34]

> *"Agility is crucial for organisations and individuals. The data is clear – social media (both internal and external) offers fertile ground for learning, yet it's potential is largely untapped. L&D teams have an opportunity to meet their workforce where they are at with social media – supporting them to use the platforms and spaces where they are already active to share knowledge, reflect, and improve their individual and collective practice."*

Michelle Ockers
Founder & Chief Learning Strategist, Learning Uncut

[32] Serhan, S. A. L., and Yahaya, N. (2022) 'A systematic review and trend analysis of personal learning environments research', *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 12(1), pp. 43–53, **https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2022.12.1.1585** [33] Blaschke L. M. (2014) 'Using social media to engage and develop the online learner in self-determined learning', *Research in Learning Technology*, 22, pp.1–23 **https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v22.21635** [34] Ibid. On page 20 of Blaschke's research report, the author provides guidance on how social media can be incorporated into the learning environment.

What have we learned?

As just one example of how technology can be used by organizations to support learning, social media has far-reaching potential. Most employees are already using it, and many of those are relying on social media to acquire knowledge and find out about new opportunities.

Earlier in this report, we talked about the modern learner being someone who wants to access learning resources at the point of need. But recent research also shows that employees rate collaboration and support from their colleagues well above other approaches to dealing with challenges at work (like guided courses).[35] In both instances, social media supports this type of learner.

While the benefits of learning socially online are now well documented – both for the employee and the organization – L&D have a responsibility to ensure that learners get the most out of it. With so few organizations knowing how their employees use social media, this is an excellent place to start and an opportunity worth grabbing. Organizations should be asking learners where they spend their time online, which sites they value, and what they use them for. Only then can L&D teams make purposeful decisions about how they can transform organizational learning through technology, with practices and initiatives that have defined top-performing organizations for the last two decades. These include peer coaching, communities of practice, and PLEs.

[35] Mind Tools for Business (2022) *Learner Intelligence report: Engaging with learning in the reimagined workplace,* Available at **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/research-and-reports/learner-intelligence-report-2022** (Accessed 28 March 2023)

(7)

Summary

We began collecting data about organizational learning in 2003 and have spoken to more than 11,000 L&D leaders over the last 20 years. In this report, we have looked back and reflected on some of the milestones we've shared as an L&D industry in that time. One of the key lessons we've learned is that success isn't measured by what you do, but why you do it – a message we'll unpack in greater detail in the second part of this 2023 Annual Benchmarking report series.

To identify what makes a top-performing L&D team, we shone a spotlight on what organizations were doing in 2017 when the OLI peaked for the first time and then again in 2020 when it plummeted. We found that the more mature learning organizations were the ones with a higher proportion of coaching capabilities in-house and the ones prioritizing collaboration. Consistently, coaching and collaboration have been strong markers of high-impact L&D teams over the years. But they're also useful examples of how top-performing teams build connections between activities (like developing peer coaching) to strengthen their overall impact.

Quite significantly, the biggest challenge and opportunity for L&D over the last 20 years has been related to technology. The data shows that organizations have been slow to keep up with rapid advances, even by the standards of L&D leaders themselves, who predicted that blended learning would increase at a much higher rate than it has done. It seems that many organizations haven't had the capabilities in place to support the evolving learner – one who now cares more about being able to access resources at the point of need and not in a formal, classroom setting. These organizations have grappled since the beginning of this study with stakeholders who are reluctant to adapt to new ways of doing things.

Part of the difficulty for organizations is that they don't fully understand the potential of some technologies for learning (such as social media, which has been shown in academic research to increase employee engagement). Instead, when faced with unstable environments, L&D teams have tended to lean more on practical, in-the-moment solutions without the infrastructure in place to support them. An example is the decision by some organizations to encourage the use of social media to support remote workers in 2020, even though they didn't understand how employees interacted with it.

But it's never too late. Top-performing organizations are the ones using technology to their advantage – meeting employees in places where they're already engaged, and facilitating practices that have been shown to have long-term impact for learners, organizations, and, crucially, L&D teams (like peer coaching, communities of practice, and PLEs). These practices are the kind that encourage learners to develop their own capabilities (such as self-directedness), which helps shift the responsibility for learning from L&D to employee and frees L&D up to do more of what they'd like and need to (e.g., experiment with new ideas and upskill in areas related to data).

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ANNUAL BENCHMARKING REPORT 2023

PART ONE OF THREE

LEARNING MATURITY PEAKED IN 2017...

...AND PLUMMETED IN 2020

L&D focused on supporting collaborative learning

63% of L&D teams had coaching capabilities in-house

Unexpected challenges forced L&D to focus more on the practicalities of learning...

...and less on increasing innovation, building capabilities, and future-proofing the business

LESSONS LEARNED FROM 20 YEARS OF RESEARCH

Success as an L&D team is not about what you're doing, but why you're doing it.

Strategic and business alignment is the marker of a top-performing team
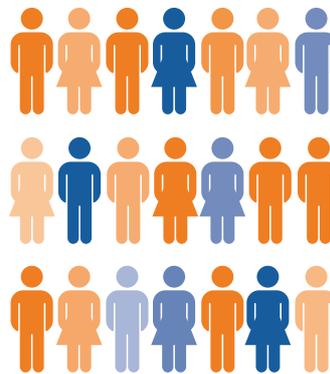
SINCE 2003, WE HAVE SPOKEN TO MORE THAN 11,000 L&D LEADERS ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING.

Social media provides L&D with opportunities to boost engagement and develop learner capabilities

Classroom skills have been the #1 capability of L&D teams for the past 20 years

TECHNOLOGY OVER THE YEARS

84% of learning technologies have remained unchanged in popularity since 2014

L&D's use of social media has declined from 46% in 2014 to 38% in 2023

Each year, 75% of L&D leaders predict that blended learning will increase

But since 2016, blended learning has decreased by 3%

⑨

Methodology

This report has provided a retrospective of the last 20 years, where we've looked back on the reports we've published in that time and some of the key milestones and events the L&D industry has experienced. Where research has been cited, we've included references in the footnotes with accompanying links to each report. There, you'll find a breakdown of the data (i.e., number of participants, percentage of participants from different industries, regions etc.) in a Methodology section similar to this one.

Most of the data in this report is collected online from learning leaders who take part in the Learning Performance Benchmark.[36] The Learning Performance Benchmark is a free resource that helps L&D professionals to reflect on their learning strategies, think about and prepare for the future, and compare their learning maturity against other organizations. Thanks to the many organizations that have taken part in the Benchmark over the last 20 years, today we have a growing dataset of responses from more than 11,000 L&D leaders.

For this report, we have also drawn on the Learning Performance Benchmark data for 2023, which is new for this year. Our second report in this Annual Benchmarking report series will explore this data in more detail and provide a full breakdown of the demographics. But, for information, the data has been collected from 912 learner leaders across 19 different industries between December 2021 and December 2022.

The data in this report is mostly summarized as percentages but, in the previous reports we have referenced, we have also performed several advanced statistical tests to understand the relationships, differences and patterns we have observed. The claims and predictions we make in our reports are based on statistical significance, for which we use a *p*-value of .05 as our cut-off. This means that there is less than a 5% probability that the results we observe are random (and, therefore, a 95% probability that we've stumbled on something pretty important!). Some of the statistical tests we have used in our research include:

▸ **Cronbach's alpha**
▸ **Correlation**
▸ **Linear and multiple regression**
▸ ***t*-test**

To perform these tests, we have used two statistical software packages: R and STATA. If you have any questions or would like to know more about how we have analyzed our data, please contact us directly.

[36] To find out more about the Learning Performance Benchmark, or to take part, visit: **https://mindtoolsbusiness.com/solutions/learning-performance-benchmark** [37] Our data is collected in December-December waves, so that we can create benchmarks each year using data from the previous year.