

BROUGHT
TO YOU *by*



SWEETRUSH®

Current Trends in Learning and Development
& Learning Experience Design

L&D CHALLENGES,
LIFE-CENTERED SOLUTIONS:
TRANSFORMING
BUSINESS & UNLOCKING
HUMAN POTENTIAL



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INTRODUCTION

USING THE CRAFT OF *LEARNING* TO REALIZE AND EXPAND *HUMAN* *POTENTIAL*

In this unique moment in human history, **all of us in the learning industry are sitting center stage:** witnesses to—and active participants in—a palpable **shift in how we teach, learn, inform, and change behavior through learning and development (L&D).**

And one thing is crystal clear:
Learning that simply checks the box
is no longer good enough.

Like a spiral moving upward, learning is evolving. It starts by heightening engagement, making learning more attractive, intuitive, and perhaps even fun. We advance to be more learner-centric, taking time to understand, empathize, and speak authentically to our audiences; learning is personalized, accessible, and inclusive.



And now, we're starting to see L&D's impact at the next level: learning that supports, builds up, and expands the potential of humans and life in our world. **When we use our craft to help people become their best, whole selves—better friends, partners, parents, caretakers, stewards of nature, and members of our connected global community—we foster the same skills, mindsets, and behaviors that make people better colleagues and leaders, more creative, collaborative, and productive, and a more engaged workforce.**

What's driving this evolution in learning? Change and disruption are happening, and how well and how quickly you adapt—and transform—depends on how you treat your people. And employees are stepping up and taking risks to make their voices and needs heard. They're seeking out new employers that offer values, culture, and learning that aligns with who they are and who they want to become.

So, what once was L&D's aspirational vision is becoming reality. Some leaders have embraced this as essential to the future of work and life on Earth; others see a path to a stronger bottom line. If you're eager to push our craft forward (we are!), it's all good news. Still, there are real challenges in our path, not least of all are the impacts of global crises, human suffering, and social unrest.

The SweetRush team is actively looking at, thinking about, and designing for these challenges. Each year we look at industry trends, and our focus is always the same: The real headlines are the common challenges that our clients and friends in the L&D community are facing. From there, we can invent and innovate our way into new solutions that embrace **culture, leadership, and learning—the trinity of transformation.**

In this report, we present findings from our first learning trends survey, along with insights from contributors across our many disciplines:



LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN



DATA ANALYTICS



IMMERSIVE TECH



SOLUTION ARCHITECTURE



CULTURE TRANSFORMATION



AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

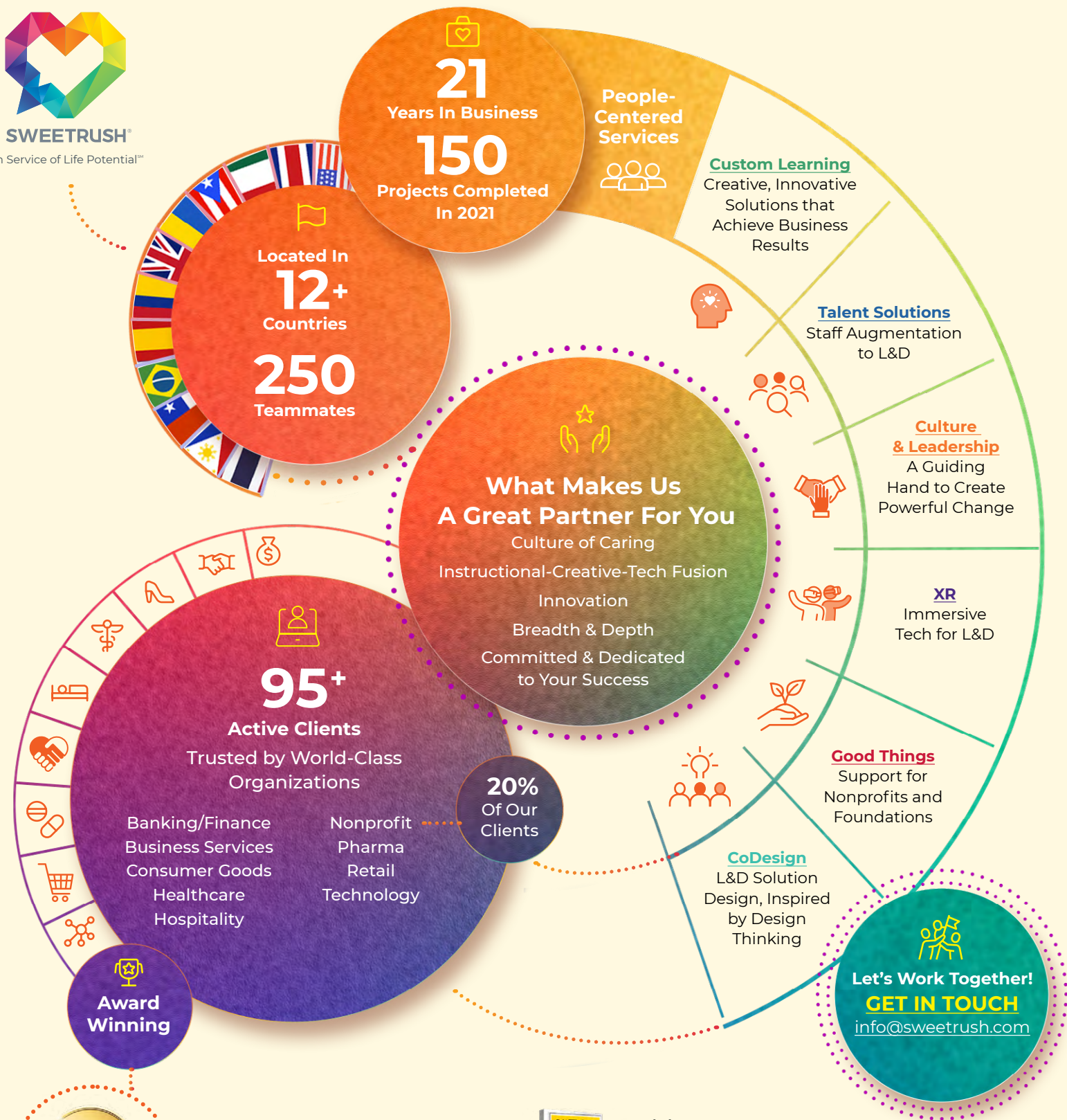
If you're new to SweetRush—welcome, friend. We're so glad to have you. If you're a long-time collaborator or peer—welcome back! We hope these insights spark inspiration to elevate our craft, be bold, and find new ways to be in service to each other.





SWEETRUSH®

In Service of Life Potential™



Brandon Hall Group Awards 2017-2021
119 Awards, 83 GOLD, in 27 Categories
Wins with adidas, Google, Hilton, Pfizer, Wells Fargo



Training Industry, Top 20
Custom Content Development
8 Years Running



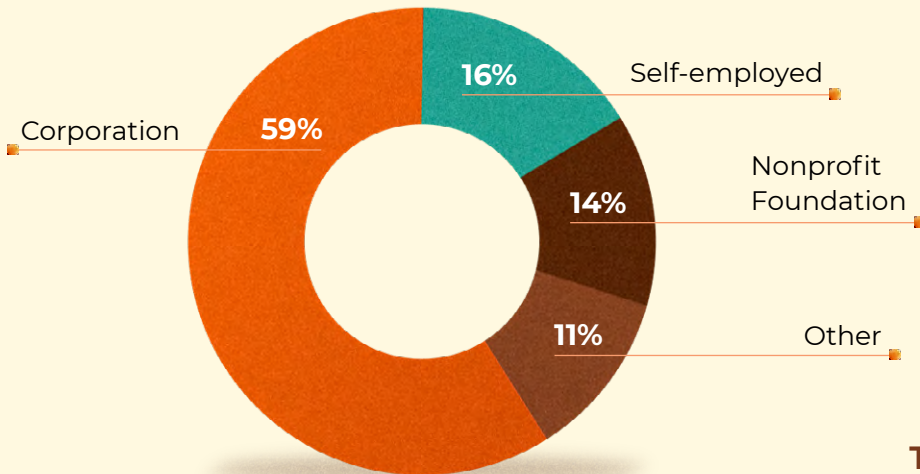
eLearning Industry, Chosen #1
Best Virtual Training Company &
Most Socially Responsible eLearning Company



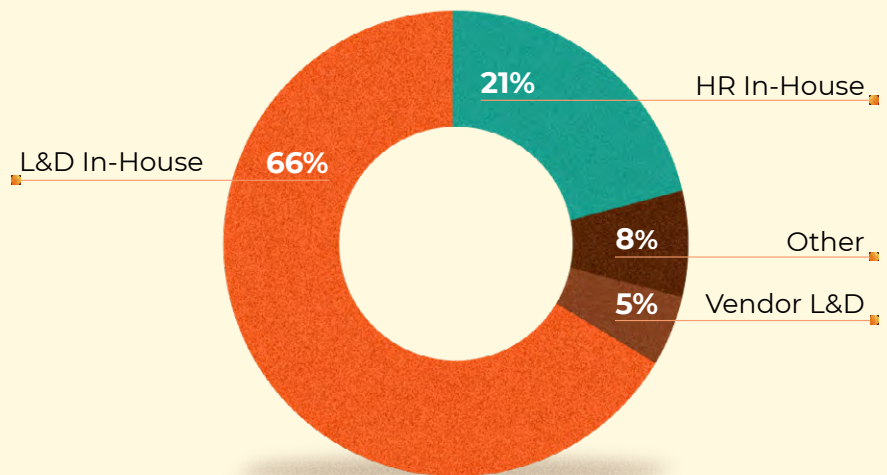
Chief Learning Officer
5 GOLD: Community Service,
Content, eLearning,
Tech Innovation (x2)

SURVEY SAYS: *WHO* RESPONDED

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

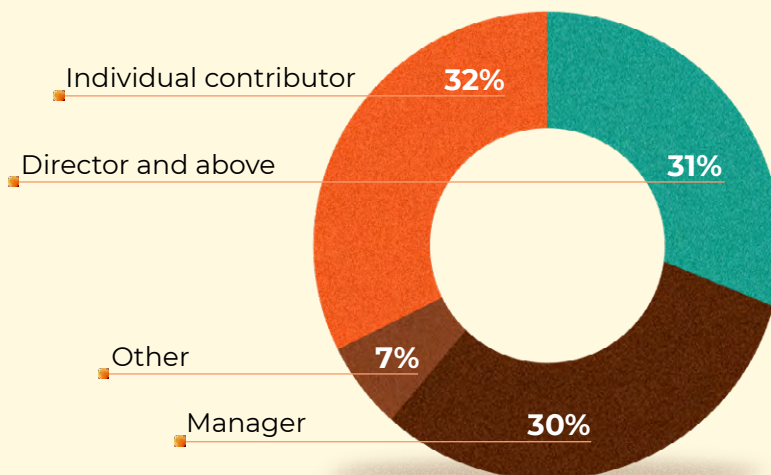


TYPE OF TEAM



40%
of respondents are
L&D corporate leaders

TYPE OF ROLE



Our survey ran from
**December 2021 to
February 2022** and we collected
a total of **241 responses**.



SECTION 1

LET'S TALK ABOUT *SKILLS*

Skills have become a front-and-center executive leadership priority. Understanding the state of skills company-wide—what exists, what can be built upon, and what skills are needed for the future—helps shine a light on human potential, the future of work, and L&D priorities.

In this section, we look at some of the top skills in demand, the challenges and opportunities for upskilling, reskilling, and skills-based talent management, and insights about the most important skills to support change.



SURVEY SAYS: TOP SKILLS IN DEMAND

We asked, As we move into 2022, what learning needs are becoming more important for your organization? The top choice: **agility** and **adaptability** by a sizable margin.

1

L&D leaders also ranked **agility** and **adaptability** #1

“

While a vision may not change, strategy does change and we have to pivot more quickly every day.

”

—L&D Leader

1	Agility and adaptability	49.8%
2	Analytics and reporting	31.5%
3	Leadership	31.1%
4	Collaboration	27.8%
tie	Strategic thinking	27.8%
6	Innovation	25.7%
7	Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB)	25.3%
8	Critical thinking	24.5%
9	Coaching mindset	22.8%
tie	Growth mindset	22.8%

3

“

As the work environment has shifted due to social change and hybrid, some skills are new but others have been a trend for a number of years, like data and analytics and leadership. It's the kind of leadership training that has changed—focus on mental health and wellness of others...

”

—L&D Leader

7

L&D leaders ranked **DEIB** #4

“

What we're seeing is a day-to-day partnership of the DEI and L&D teams to design, plan, and implement DEI learning curricula and resources for the organization that build belonging for all and also lay the foundation of an inclusive leadership model.

”

—L&D Leader



This choice isn't surprising given the ripple effects of disruption we've been feeling since 2020 and the imperative to respond rapidly to change. Some companies were not prepared to be nimble, but now, in the face of ongoing uncertainty and change, they're implementing—or desire to implement—programs to encourage and embed agile mindsets and practices.

But here's what was interesting: **resilience** didn't make the top 10 as a learning need, but a surprising number of respondents mentioned it in the open-ended follow-up. One L&D leader shared,

“
In the last week, I've had 3 managers in 3 different business units ask for a consultation about what I can do with my team to help them be more resilient. When we dig into this, **every request to date is really about well-being: how may I and my team take better care of ourselves within an environment we can't control?**”

This begs the question: Is there enough focus on building people's **emotional capacity** to be agile and adaptable? [Read more about the connection between agility, adaptability, and resilience.](#)

Related to agility and adaptability, respondents also shared:

Problem-solving capabilities are needed more than ever.

You can easily draw a line to



collaboration



strategic thinking



and critical thinking

as related, depending on the role and situation.

Looking at the data for just L&D leaders, they ranked DEIB, critical thinking, and coaching mindset higher. These are front-and-center skills that are crucial for fostering inclusive workplaces, where employees feel supported as people and are growing as professionals. It makes sense that we've had a lot of demand for leadership training in 2020 and 2021, including large-scale certification-type programs, social learning-driven upskilling, and habit-building in the flow of work. [Read about an innovative leadership training program we created with Bayer.](#)

While our survey question focuses on specific in-demand skills, we're of course looking at the enterprise-wide challenge of defining, assessing, and teaching all of these skills at *scale*. Quantum labor analysis, with the data it reaps, along with skills ontologies (which help show the relationships between skills and are creating a common language for skills) are emerging with great potential to help visualize the state of skills in an organization.

What we're now actively working on and excited about is, once we have that data, how to efficiently interpret it and build successful, learner-centric upskilling and certification programs. These holistic, next-level learning journeys bring together the best of L&D and have the power to be transformative. [Read more about the skills challenge and opportunity.](#)



THE SKILLS CHALLENGE & THE SKILLS OPPORTUNITY

By **John Cleave**, SweetRush Senior Learning Engineer, and **Danielle Hart**, SweetRush Director of Marketing

What's the top organizational priority that has the most impact on what we do in L&D? **Skills**. Executive leaders want to know: How do we identify, analyze, and assess skills to ensure we hire, upskill, and reskill people to build the business and culture we want?

It's not a new conversation; competency modeling has been around for many many years. But today, the drivers are fierce. Digital transformation, massively accelerated by the pandemic, has resulted in glaring skill gaps, fueling dysfunction, dissatisfaction, and the Great Resignation—and more potential disruption from climate change is on the horizon. Our people, and the organizations they work for, need the right skills more than ever.

Organizations need to know what skills their people have, which ones they need, and how to teach them to apply those skills on the job. Enter quantum labor analysis and AI, to do what AI does best: analyze a lot of data to give us faster insight into the big picture.

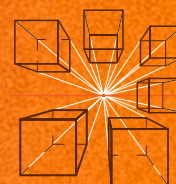
Yet from that big picture, certain challenges come to light:



SKILLS ARE CONTEXTUAL TO ROLES.

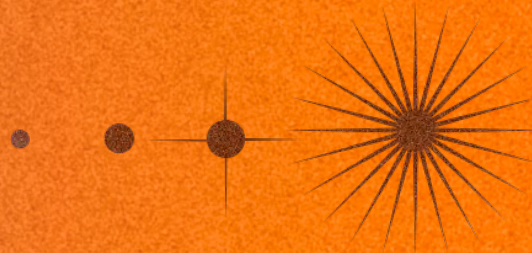
For example, let's take "communication."

Different roles will apply that skill in different ways; think about people who are customer-facing vs. those who work with internal teams. There will be overlap, and there will be nuances.



SKILLS ASSESSMENT AT SCALE ISN'T EASY.

Self-assessments and past work experience offer a limited view; adding managers and peers (360) can be a heavy lift. Simulations can be used to measure skills but are a bigger investment and may introduce bias.



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (DONE WELL) TAKES TIME.

Off-the-shelf training and curating learning paths are faster options but often miss the mark on both engagement and transfer.

Now, the opportunity. Yes, we need to really understand the challenges of this top-down view of what and how the business needs its people to perform. But to solve the skills challenge, we need to also see the learner's perspective. And we need to dream big.

If we could give our people the ultimate skills development experience, what would it be? *What would we want ourselves? What are your thoughts on solving this future of work challenge?*

This ideal future state would feel tailored to you while integrating what the business needs you to do. You get a solid foundation, and you're challenged to apply what you've learned in a way that's relevant to what you do. You interact with others, perhaps learning collaboratively, perhaps being coached by a manager or mentor. You build on your skills over time, and you take them with you wherever you go. You're surprised. Sometimes you laugh. At times it might be hard. You stay motivated. You achieve. You celebrate.

74%

of CEOs are concerned about the availability of key skills

40%

of workers will require up to six months of reskilling by 2025

Source: World Economic Forum, PWC Analysis¹

As we move toward this future state, we're seeing some clever and effective skills development solutions emerge.

We're challenging the old "build or buy" question—and its newest addition, "or curate." Increasingly, we are designing sophisticated learning journeys that leverage off-the-shelf content and curated learning paths and have the "glue" that heightens engagement and delivers on skills transfer: the right learning moments in the right modality at the right time, tying the program together. Think smart cohort design, collaborative learning activities, video, microlearning, self-reflection, rituals and artifacts, gamification, and ways to measure and evaluate it all. All are weaved together to create a coherent, connected, and inclusive learning experience.



Fosway Group calls these "continuous, action-based development programmes," which are distinctly different from "courses vs. resources."² These programs are easy for learners to engage with, agile in nature, promote continuous learning, and target measurable outcomes.

We've got real challenges and exciting possibilities. Technology will advance, and new ideas will emerge. And as long as we keep our people at the heart of our solutions, together we can crack the code on skills.

¹ <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/reinventing-the-future/take-on-tomorrow/covid-disparity-evaluation.html>

² <https://www.fosway.com/putting-continuous-learning-at-the-heart-of-skills-development/>



WHAT SNICKERS AND CARROTS CAN TEACH US ABOUT **AGILITY, ADAPTABILITY, & RESILIENCE**

By **Tiffany Vojnovski**, SweetRush Learning Evangelist

After the past two years, pivoting is part of everyone's job description—so it was no surprise that **agility** and **adaptability** topped L&D leaders' list of skills in demand. And as shared earlier, the need for **resilience** came through in many of the open comments.

Why is resilience so intertwined with adaptability and agility? **Dané Johnson**, SweetRush Culture Consultant, explains:

“**Resilience is the prerequisite to adaptability and agility. Under conditions of ongoing change and transition, resilience helps us preserve emotional energy and remain open to possibilities.**”

To weather global uncertainty and unrest and ever-more-demanding workloads, we need more resilience. Here's why that can be tough to develop.

Many of us have been trained from an early age to feel validated—and valued—when we achieve and produce. Receiving praise or being the last to log off delivers a temporary dopamine hit...before we start looking for the next.

Winning the proverbial “carrot” feels good in the moment, but chasing it is exhausting and can lead to people-pleasing behaviors and weakened work-life boundaries.

Avoiding the “stick” also takes a physical toll: When we face criticism or a volatile colleague, our fear brain activates, causing us to **literally** lose ourselves. In fear mode, it's physically impossible to think critically, empathize, or solve problems creatively.³

Over the long term, the stress of the perpetually reactive, carrot-and-stick mode can lead to long-term inflammation which, in turn, leaves us vulnerable to other diseases (*Liu, Wang, and Jiang, 2017*).

Remember the Snickers commercial: **“You're not you when you're hungry”?**

The same is true under stress. We lose our ability to do the things that make us, us—like think creatively, collaborate, or treat others with grace.⁴

³ [Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014](#)

⁴ [Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014](#)



How can we rewire ourselves for resilience? First, we need to get off the grid of reactivity—and into the space between stimulus and response.

Viktor Frankl, psychotherapist, neurologist, and Holocaust survivor, on the space between stimulus and response:

“
In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
”

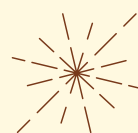
That means heeding our fundamental need for daylight, nourishment, movement, and rest during work hours—and all day. When, how, and how often we answer these needs varies with our mood and energy level, and with the way our brains and bodies work. By meeting these fundamental needs, we prevent our fear brain from firing and enable higher-order thinking.

Here are three ways we can support others' resilience:



1. LOG OFF!

Consider how we help perpetuate a team culture of what Dané calls “nonstopness”—an always-on, always-alert mentality that keeps everyone in a reactive state. That can be as simple as rethinking that late IM or weekend email.



2. REMEMBER THAT WORDS MATTER.

Humans tend to perceive messages negatively, especially amid stress and uncertainty. To support bandwidth, author Liz Fosslien encourages us to “emotionally proofread” messages before sending.⁵ Who wouldn't prefer “Let's brainstorm” over “We need to talk”?



3. ASK ABOUT—AND HONOR—COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES.

Meeting others through their preferred mode of communication helps them show up as their best selves. That team member who appears evasive and uncomfortable on video calls might be an amazing asynchronous collaborator.

We grow our collective resilience by prioritizing human needs—and by taking the time and care to find space between stimulus and response. If others aren't yet seeing that space, keep holding it for them: In time, they'll meet you there.

⁵ <https://www.ideo.com/blogs/inspiration/12-power-skills-to-fuel-your-growth-in-2022>



FURTHER READING ON RESILIENCE



[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Communicate for Resilience: A Five-Step Challenge for L&D Teams

Amidst our current crisis of emotional resilience, the way we treat each other has an outsized effect on our quality of life. This five-step teamwork, collaboration, and communication challenge will help your L&D team develop the soft skills we need to get through the hard times.



[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

The Human and Business Benefits of Boosting Employee Resilience and Potential

About one in three forward-thinking leaders has always understood that supporting the “care and resilience of human workers” goes hand in hand with profits. In this article, discover the three stages of human potential and consider how your organization supports its employees.



[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

It's All About Your People!

You need to attract and retain your best people, and the path to do that is human-centered: putting your focus on the critical areas of culture, leadership, DEIB, and learning.

We've compiled stories, best practices, and actionable ideas to inspire leaders like you with a bold, fresh vision for achieving your organizational mission.

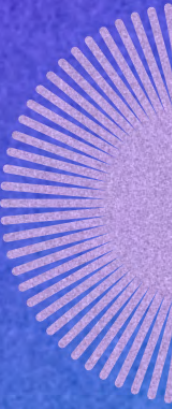


SECTION 2

A NEW MOMENT FOR *L&D*

Never before has learning and development been so central to business strategy. This new moment can feel revitalizing as opportunities emerge to make significant, company-wide positive impact. We're hearing about the challenges, too, including the struggle to keep pace with current and new demands; after all, the Great Reshuffle is also affecting L&D teams.

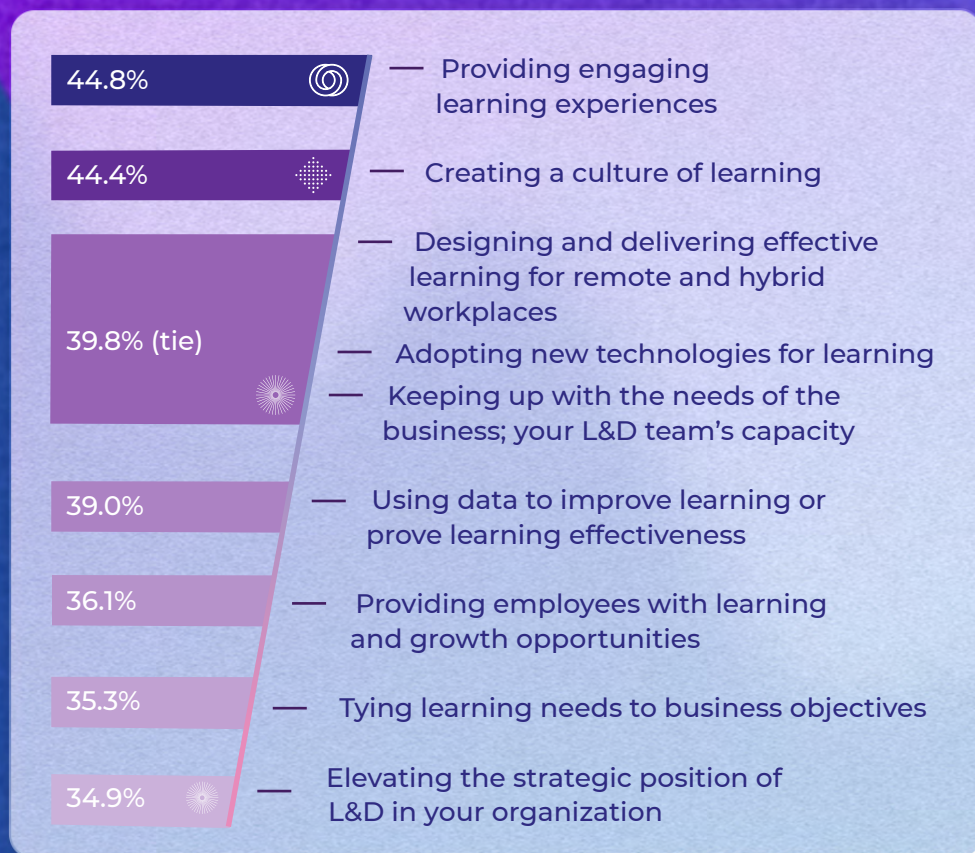
In this section, we explore some of the top challenges facing L&D organizations. **We'll also share some insights on the strategic position of L&D and explain how measuring and evaluating L&D programs may be easier than you think.**



SURVEY SAYS: TOP L&D CHALLENGES

We asked, “What are the top challenges in your learning organization that need the most love?” The top two challenges, with nearly identical votes:

providing engaging learning experiences and **creating a culture of learning** while competing for learner attention.



“

Engaging learning takes more time than just having a group of instructional designers throw together quick content they've built 100 times before. **It has to be thoughtful, everyone has to be on board, and then we have to have the right tools to deliver it in the right places at the right time.** But if we fail to build the right, engaging content, everything else after that fails.

”

—L&D Leader



Desire:

Self-motivation and taking ownership for learning

Reality:

Demands on attention and time

“

Competing for the time and attention of our learners...finding creative solutions to this problem is a MUST.

”

—L&D Leader



Lack of capacity is a roadblock to elevating the strategic position of L&D.

“

My team is at capacity with programs and projects in our roadmap/pipeline that we're not getting to. So, when we truly have an organization where all leaders give L&D a seat at the strategy table as a business partner — which we continue to move toward every week — what will we have to do to ensure we deliver on driving business results?

”

—L&D Leader



In fact, the top three challenges speak to the need for training that works for learners and environments in which people are given space to learn—and are motivated to take ownership for their own learning.

“

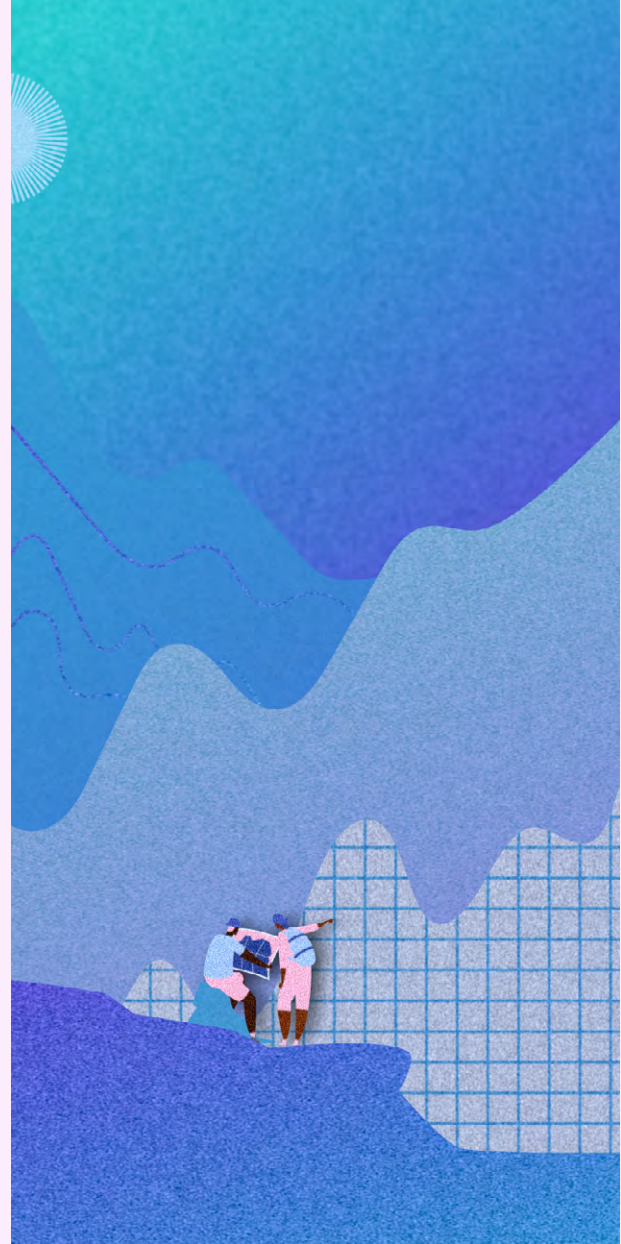
Giving workers more control over what work they do and what learning experiences to pursue can increase their engagement because it allows them to focus their efforts on things that truly matter to them.

”

—2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Report⁶

We're completely aligned with this perspective from Deloitte on learner autonomy and agency—and we'll also add to it. Learning experiences also need to **speak authentically to your people, meet them where they are, and make valuable use of their time.** [Read about our collaboration with Bayer; it could spark some ideas for you.](#)

Our open-ended follow-up revealed what's been really *tough* to solve: L&D team capacity and capabilities. We're seeing it with our clients; L&D itself is not immune to the Great Reshuffle. Building—or rebuilding—teams while handling the business's full pipeline of training needs is daunting. This tactical challenge can be a real roadblock to **elevating L&D's strategic position.**



62%

of L&D professionals agree that L&D is focused on rebuilding or reshaping their organization in 2022

Source: LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2022⁷

6 <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends.html>

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



60%

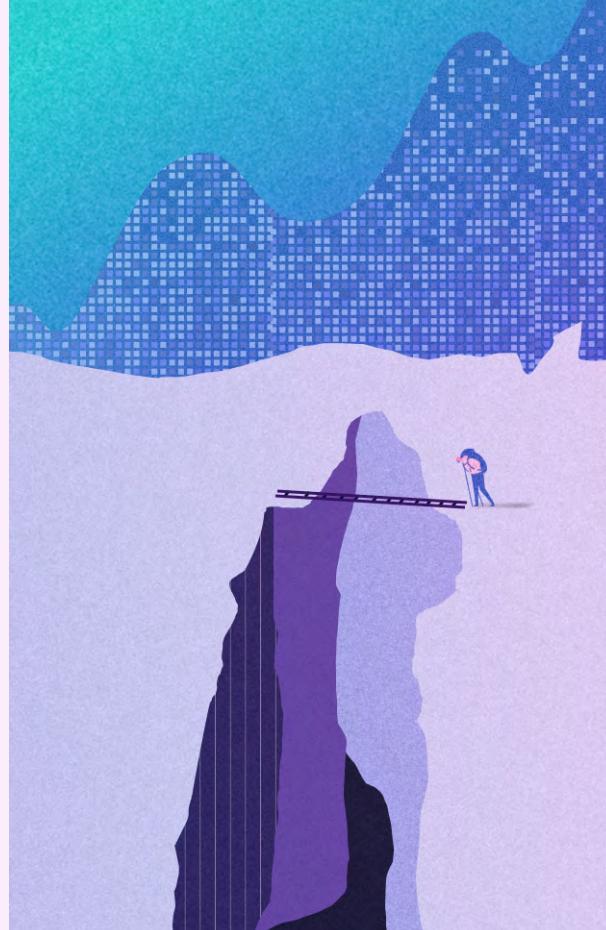
of “more advanced” organizations agree that upskilling programmes were very effective in achieving stronger corporate culture and employee engagement

Source: PWC 23rd Annual Global CEO Survey⁸

SweetRush's CEO Andrei Hedstrom offers some perspective on **organizational strategy and L&D** based on his conversations with L&D leaders. Andrei's take is, we should celebrate what all of us in L&D have always known: building people up matters. Now, in this time of disruption, is the moment for a mindset shift that creates pathways for fresh ideas to emerge and be heard. [Read about this opportunity for L&D leaders.](#)

Many respondents pointed to the challenge of **using data**: having access to the right data to analyze and tying it to learning engagement and performance. We're here to encourage you to think about measurement and evaluation differently; simply put, it doesn't need to be hard. [Check out this interview with senior learning professional Emma Klosson for insights.](#)

From L&D leaders' responses, it's loud and clear that a major concern is **using learning to attract and retain employees across the organization**. This likely reflects leaders' more global view of the organization and the strong tie between talent recruitment and talent development.



Our prediction: This will come into sharper focus for all practitioners in L&D as the Great Reshuffle continues into 2022.

A Helping Hand with the Great Reshuffle

If you need great L&D talent to close gaps in your team and keep pace with organizational demand, we can help. This is the sole focus of our Talent Solutions team: to find learning and development superstars for our own team, for our clients, and for you. Click below to learn more or reach out directly to Rodrigo Salazar-Kawer; it would make his day to hear from you.

FIND L&D TALENT

⁸ <https://www.pwc.com/jg/en/publications/ceo-survey.html>



A NEW WAY OF SERVING: ELEVATE THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF L&D WITH THIS MINDSET SHIFT

By **Andrei Hedstrom, SweetRush CEO**

L&D leaders and seasoned pros, congratulations: Your time has come. You've worked hard for decades to elevate the craft—once considered an afterthought—and now you're being asked to create, contribute to, guide, and shape business strategy and transformation.

The pandemic may have fast-tracked this moment, but make no mistake, it was coming, supported by a growing body of evidence. Focusing on our people is the path to transform business and society for the better. **The case is building for lifting up the potential in each person to collectively achieve greater impact and value, a fundamental shift in economic thinking.** (Organizations with knowledge workers may be ahead of the curve, but it's being proven in other types of workplaces in studies from Accenture⁹ and other consulting firms.)

⁹ https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/Thought-Leadership-Assets/PDF-3/Accenture-Care-To-Do-Better-Report.pdf#zoom=50

¹⁰ <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report>

In human-centered fields like L&D, culture transformation, and HR, this is our native mindset. Business leaders are learning what we have known and practiced. For years we've done this work, persisting through lack of resources and sufficient means to analyze and evaluate. Because we know that when you build up a person, they build up their community and the organizations to which they belong.

So we've been taking notes and dreaming of what more we could do when given the opportunity. And now, we're being called upon to be part of this human-centered transformation, to inform and shape what an organization can achieve by truly supporting and enriching its people.

72%

agree that L&D has become a more strategic function at their organization

87%

had some to a great deal of involvement in helping their organization adapt to change

Source: LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2022¹⁰



But here's the thing: This work requires us to make a significant mindset shift. We've been so good at being ready to help. **Now, at the big tables, we need to be more consultative and more assertive.** Now we need to generate ideas alongside the parts of the organization we're used to taking orders from.

The way we show up at this moment matters. We're being called to learn the skills and attitudes to serve in strategic discussions and boardrooms—and to find ways of shifting the practices in those rooms to align with human-centered work. It's a beautiful step forward in our journey. **We've moved from knowing what good learning is and how to do it, to a deeper understanding of the organizations we've served.**

We've made more informed and stronger pitches for how we can address business challenges. The next step is shifting our relationship with the people who have responsibility for those challenges. It's telling them we want to and are ready to hold those challenges with them.

To do this, you may need to be honest about your own learning curve, and that's OK.

Be forward in saying what you believe: If you can hold these challenges, too, you can bring fresh ideas and solutions to the table, beyond what they might have thought was possible.

L&D friends, seize the day. Create your human-centered practice for shaping strategy and transforming organizations. Be bold. Stretch yourself. Leave your mark. It matters more than ever.

Life-Centered Organizational Transformation

SweetRush's true north is to be In Service of Life PotentialSM. As SweetRush CEO, Andrei is leading our new organizational transformation offering, which integrates L&D, culture and leadership transformation, sustainability practices, and emerging technologies to support human potential and the potential of the living systems we are a part of. Please reach out to learn more; he would love to hear from you.

[CONTACT ANDREI](#)



YES, YOU CAN GATHER AND USE DATA TO IMPROVE LEARNING (AND PROVE ITS EFFECTIVENESS)

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

Every aspect of business is becoming more data-driven, and L&D is no exception. Yet some L&D leaders and teams are struggling to put efficient measurement, evaluation, and learning analytics programs into practice.

We asked Emma Klosson, author of *The Needs Analysis Playbook* and senior learning professional, about some of the challenges and concerns that L&D professionals shared in the survey results.

Emma, throughout the report, we're seeing several themes emerging around business needs alignment, analytics, and evaluation. Does this surprise you at all?

Emma: No, I'm not at all surprised to see these themes emerge. Needs analysis and particularly evaluation frequently pop up in these types of surveys either as skill gaps or needs. What's interesting about this survey is that there appears to be more focus and urgency around these topics than I've seen in the past.

Why do you think that is?

Emma: As Andrei has already shared, L&D is having a bit of a moment right now! We've got our seat at the table, and we want to keep it!

The workplace is evolving at breakneck speed, and businesses are attempting to prepare themselves for yet-to-be-determined future states. For some companies, that means upskilling their workforce as technology and processes evolve. For others it means anticipating the needs of roles that don't even exist yet. Regardless of the strategy, **business leaders need a partner to help them get there. L&D should be that partner.**

The trouble is, until very recently, L&D was seen by most companies and business leaders as an on-demand resource that, to Andrei's point, takes orders. Would you invite an order taker to consult on the future of your company? I wouldn't.

To keep our seat at the table, and be invited into more of these conversations, we need to prove we are a trusted partner, who adds value. We must be more consultative and speak the language of business: which is results-oriented.

And to do that, we need to get better at having conversations about measurement and building evaluation strategies into our learning solutions.

If I had my way, every learning solution would include a robust evaluation strategy. Better yet, **every learning solution would begin with a robust evaluation strategy!**





This all makes sense. But it makes me wonder, how did we get here? Why isn't L&D developing evaluation strategies as part of their overall learning solutions?

Emma: That's a great question! In my experience, there are several reasons.

1 First, there is a common misconception that evaluation, specifically anything above Level 2 (Knowledge) is difficult. I'm here to tell you, it's not. In fact, it can be extremely easy to do. You can't build an evaluation strategy, however, without a clear understanding of the performance gaps and desired business outcomes.

2 Which leads me to the **second reason**—and you'll see this come up later in the report—which is this: **L&D professionals are also really struggling with needs analysis.** In my opinion, this is a much bigger problem. Why? Needs analysis and evaluation form the bookends of learning solution design. If needs analysis doesn't happen—and it frequently doesn't—it's impossible to develop an evaluation strategy. After all, how can you measure the effectiveness of a solution to a problem that doesn't exist or hasn't been defined?

3 The third reason goes back to the **order-taker mindset shift that needs to be made. Stakeholders frequently come to L&D with solutions already in mind**, e.g., "my team needs change management training." Without that consultative mindset, it can be difficult for L&D to challenge the stakeholder and ask those difficult questions to find out why. But we must do it!

With all that in mind, what advice would you give to L&D leaders who are dipping their toes into evaluation waters for the first time? What might you say to convince them to give it a try?

Emma: My first piece of advice would be to not put it off for a moment longer.

You simply can't afford to skip this step if you want to be seen as a trusted partner to the business. I also want to reiterate that it really doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, once you begin to understand needs analysis and evaluation, it will start to feel more like common sense than a big scary thing! Trust me.

My next tip is to educate yourself. First, on needs analysis and then on evaluation. There are so many great resources to help you get started. In my [Needs Analysis Playbook](#) I walk through the process of uncovering those all-important performance gaps and business outcomes—I also help you identify an evaluation strategy. For a deeper dive into evaluation, there's no better place to start

than [The Kirkpatrick Partners](#). Here, you'll find wonderful resources as well as classes and certification programs to help you develop and then master your evaluation skills.

(Don't forget to share what you learn with your team and create an action plan to implement best practices!)

Along the same lines, **I recommend networking with evaluation enthusiasts. Join a group. Better yet, start a group!** Many minds are better than one and there are lots of great forums out there with people who can answer your questions or give you feedback on your evaluation strategies. You can always [reach out to me](#) with questions, too!

Finally, never, ever, ever skip needs analysis. Ever! It really is the key to designing successful and impactful learning experiences. Start by focusing on the desired business outcomes and corresponding Level 4 evaluation strategy (Results) and work backwards from there.

BEYOND THE SMILE SHEET: USING xAPI TO ASSESS LEARNING ENGAGEMENT

If providing engaging learning experiences is the goal, we need to know when we're hitting the mark (and when we're not). The traditional way of assessing learning engagement is the post-training learner reaction survey, or "smile sheet"—but they have their limitations.

Enter xAPI, which can augment the smile sheet to paint a richer picture of how people actually engaged with training.

It's straightforward, tech-agnostic, and offers a lot of data to discuss and debate. John Cleave and Danielle Hart write about this exciting step forward in evaluating learning design in *Training Magazine* (to be published Summer 2022).

Join our mailing list to get notified!

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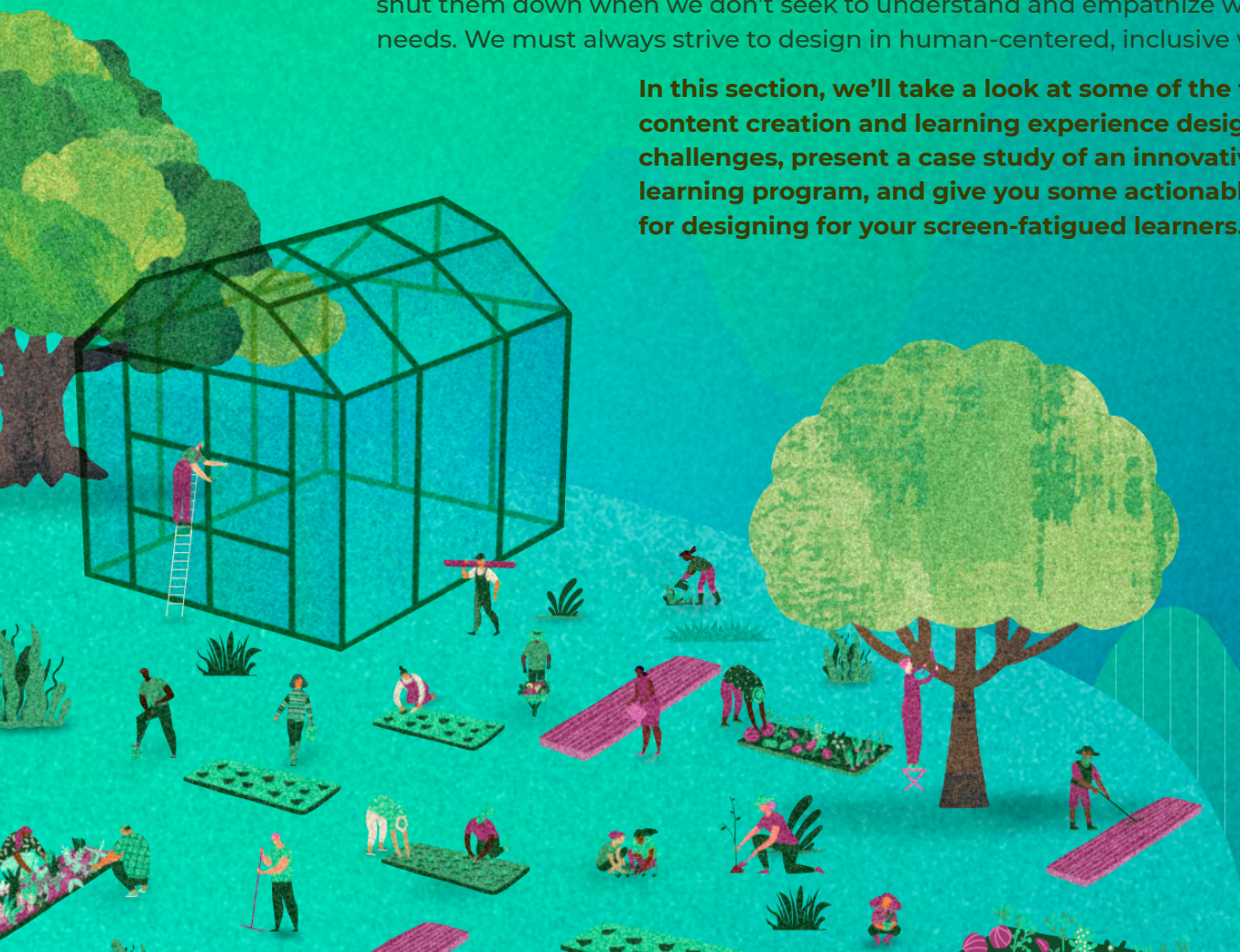


SECTION 3

BUILDING *HUMAN POTENTIAL* THROUGH LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN

It's exciting to talk about the emerging strategic role of L&D in organizations and how new techniques and technology can be applied at scale to help people thrive and adapt to change. But we can't lose sight of the actual learner experience. We have the opportunity to inspire and motivate people to grow through great design. And we also have the ability to push them away and shut them down when we don't seek to understand and empathize with their needs. We must always strive to design in human-centered, inclusive ways.

In this section, we'll take a look at some of the top content creation and learning experience design (LXD) challenges, present a case study of an innovative learning program, and give you some actionable topics for designing for your screen-fatigued learners.



TOP CONTENT CREATION CHALLENGES

We asked, *What are the top content creation challenges that have come up for you in the past 12 months?* Here's how our friends working in-house in L&D responded—both **L&D leaders** and **individual contributors**.

These two groups shared similar challenges with some notable differences in focus and ranking.

RANK	LEADERS	INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS
1	Heightening learner engagement and experience	Shifting to learner-centric (more choice and self-direction)
2	Shifting to learner-centric (more choice and self-direction)	Lack of stakeholder interest in needs analysis
3	Addressing the timeline (reality check)	Heightening learner engagement and experience
4	Tying learning needs to business objectives	Tying learning needs to business objectives
5	Designing for remote and hybrid	Designing for remote and hybrid
6	Partnering with SMEs	Partnering with SMEs
7	Multi-disciplinary collaboration (ID, multimedia, tech)	Addressing the timeline (reality check)
8	Lack of stakeholder interest in conducting needs analysis	Lack of L&D experience/expertise in needs analysis
9	Lack of existing content or resources to leverage	Lack of stakeholder commitment/interest in evaluating training beyond level 2
10	Lack of stakeholder commitment/interest in evaluating training beyond level 2	Lack of time to conduct a needs analysis

Timeline concerns ranked higher for L&D leaders. As one leader put it: "Everything has to be done yesterday."

Leaders see room for improvement in multi-disciplinary collaboration. For many teams, virtual collaboration is a new and challenging modality.

For individual contributors, needs analysis is a multi-faceted challenge. Uncovering the real need is essential to create the best solution—which may not be training.



Learner engagement and learner-centric training are in sharp focus.

These two challenges ranked in the top three for both groups. One of the clear root causes is the pivot from in-person experiences to remote, as respondents shared, “people are fed up by now with online learning,” and pointed to “screen fatigue due to COVID” which creates added pressure on “making on-demand assets and live training desirable.”

Yet they also see the value—and the need—in bringing fresh ideas and ways for learners to engage.

“Many of the teams I'm bringing together right now have done things in a prescriptive manner for a very long time. Our content will be more impactful for the learner and for the business if we allow the learners more self-direction and in-app experiences.”

—L&D leader

A trend we're seeing is taking a step back to look at programs that were quickly converted out of necessity and finding ways to improve them.

“

There's a distinct shift from 'we need an immediate solution,' to 'we need that solution to be better.' Clients are heavily evaluating and reflecting on what they already have in their learning portfolio. A particular focus is trying to reduce the demand on learner time. They're assessing if what they're offering will attract and retain people, and, if that's not the case, how they might upskill their L&D team to make that happen.”

—Annie Hodson, SweetRush Director of Client Solutions

Here in this report, we've included a case study for an innovative leadership training program for Bayer that combines bold concepts and graphic design with simple, actionable habit-building, along with links to more case studies for further inspiration. [Read more.](#)

We've also included some fresh ideas to create effective experiences for screen-fatigued learners. [Read more about communities, rituals, artifacts, and pauses.](#)

This is a topic close to our hearts, and we hope we can be a resource for you as you look to bring more creativity, empathy, and personalization to your learning experience design.



Timeline concerns ranked higher for L&D leaders.

Persistent change and the need to pivot has put greater pressure on leaders to rapidly deliver new learning programs. As one leader put it, “Everything has to be done yesterday”—that about sums it up.

Leaders are facing the balancing act of responding to business needs and making sure existing programs are accessible to those who need them, while dealing with shortages in staff.

“

The biggest challenge is finding the time to develop new content when we constantly need to adapt to the rapidly changing landscape. Most of my energy is invested in modifying how we deliver existing content and there is almost no bandwidth to develop (or research SMEs to develop) new content.

”

—L&D leader

We’re seeing the same timeline pressure working with our clients, and more and more we need to work with clients to design creative, tailored solutions that fit the circumstances of the moment and the project’s unique needs. Using design thinking techniques, integrating agile practices, and launching courses or parts of

the program over time are some of the ways you can get timelines where you need them to be.

To solve the timeline puzzle, find out what’s most important to stakeholders and be consultative and flexible, but don’t lose focus on your learners and effective design.

Leaders see room for improvement in multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Collaboration is essential to create exceptional programs that are learner-centric with high engagement. When the team and its many disciplines (instructional design, graphics and multimedia, technical) come together with a shared vision, that’s when the magic happens.

But as one respondent said, “Collaboration is tough, unless you have a team that is willing to go out of their way to work together.” And for many teams, *virtual* collaboration is brand new.

We offer the perspective that teamwork works when it’s supported by culture and process. **L&D team cultures that emphasize**



have a better chance of creating environments of psychological safety, which encourage everyone to speak up and offer creative ideas.



We went virtual over 10 years ago, and we've fostered a cohesive, connected, organized, and efficient team. *For some actionable tips to improve virtual collaboration, see these articles from [Clare Dygert](#), Director of Learning Experience and Instructional Design, and [Tiffany Vojnovski](#), Learning Evangelist.*

We will always do our part—but our very best, award-winning work benefits from strong collaboration with our clients and their stakeholders. Meaningful involvement brings out the best in everyone. For this reason, we've invested heavily in our solution design experience, *CoDesignSM*, which helps us build empathy for learners, identify constraints, prototype, and conduct user testing, together and collaboratively.

For individual contributors, needs analysis is a multi-faceted challenge.

Challenges in getting commitment, buy-in, time, and training to conduct needs analysis ranked high in our survey. As one respondent said:

“

With everyone so busy, I'm finding more and more that "project managers" assigned to address a business need are working on an island with just themselves or maybe a couple other folks they know to ID the problem and build a solution—before they even ask someone outside of the world they know how they see the problem.

”

Getting a broader view of the issue and understanding the root cause is essential to build the right solution—which may not even be training!

“

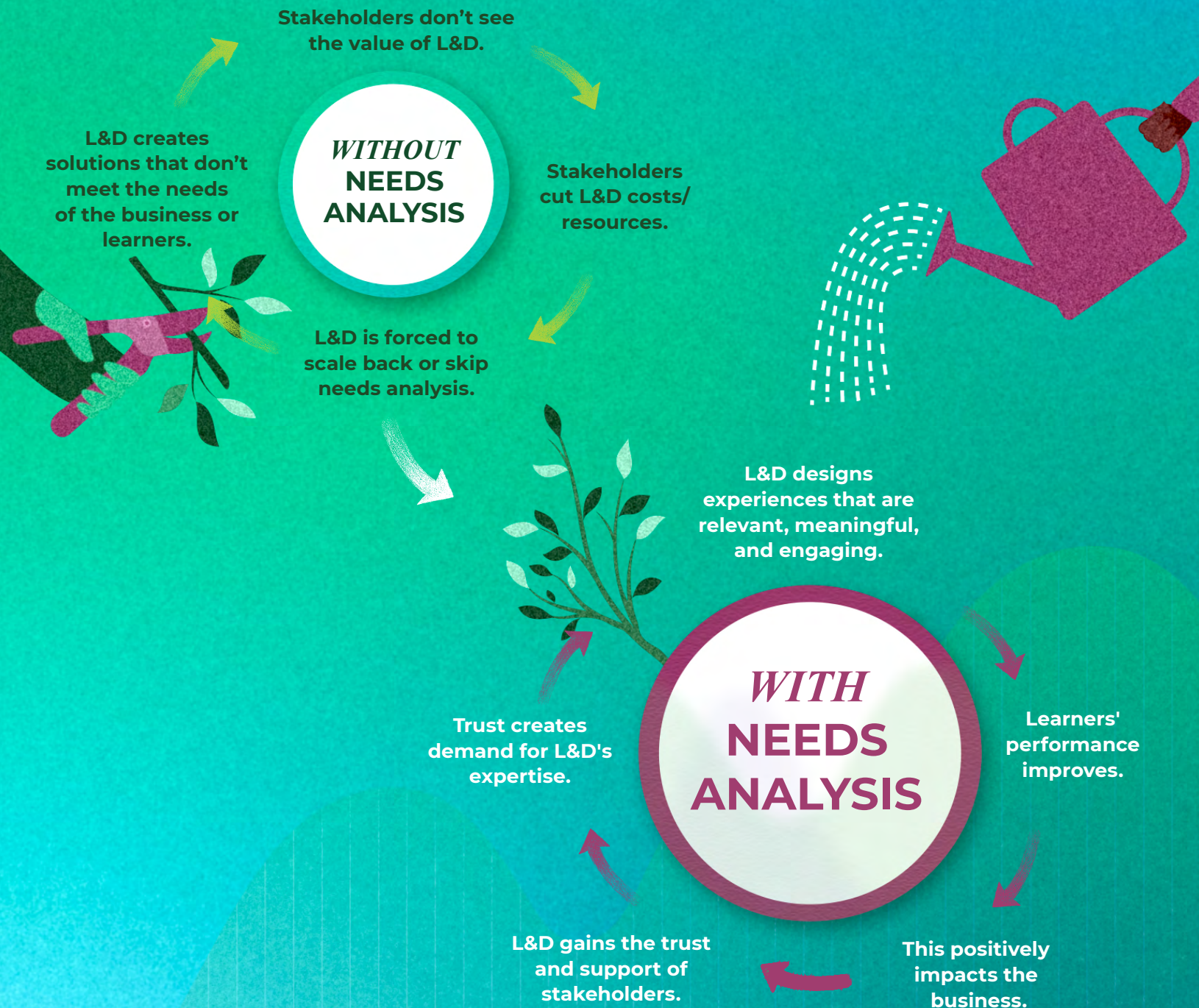
Not conducting a needs analysis is like a doctor prescribing treatment without having a clear understanding of who the patient is and what the symptoms are—not to mention details about the patient's medical history and other critical risk factors. Not only does it diminish the patient's prospects for healing, there's also a pretty big chance that the doctor may end up doing more harm than good.

”

—Emma Klosson, Learning Evangelist and author of [The Needs Analysis Playbook](#)

Whether you're an L&D leader or practitioner, Emma's book is a great resource for helping convince stakeholders of the value of needs analysis, understanding how to conduct one step-by-step, and where to save time if you need to.

BREAKING THE CYCLE: MAKE L&D A TRUSTED PARTNER WITH NEEDS ANALYSIS



CASE STUDY

HELPING LEADERS CREATE UNIFIED, HIGH-PERFORMING REMOTE/HYBRID TEAMS, ONE HABIT AT A TIME

It makes sense that leadership development is such a high priority in 2022.

***Leading in the new normal* requires new skills, behaviors, and mindsets.**

Employees want more from leaders: They want to feel trusted and valued, and they want help prioritizing. But in a hybrid world, leaders' methods need to change. Opportunities to read non-verbals and watch how team members interact can no longer come from in-person meetings and lunches. And leaders are struggling with the same things as their team members, including prioritizing workloads and making connections.

43%

of leaders say relationship-building is the greatest challenge in remote and hybrid work

Source: Microsoft, 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report¹¹

How do you inspire, motivate, and empower leaders to embrace new mindsets and skills and put them into action? **It starts with empathy for the audience.**

¹¹ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>

Leaders are busy and discriminating learners; they won't benefit from long webinars, generic content, or training that's out of date and irrelevant.

We were so fortunate to get connected to Bayer. They wanted a fresh, bold, and unique learning experience—something their leaders had never seen before—and that's the kind of challenge we love.

Rise & Thrive is, at its core, a habit-building program. By challenging traditional thinking from the start (instead of a “go big, dream big” approach, why not think small?), it meets leaders where they are. **The actionable micro-habits they learn take as little as 30 seconds to put into practice, with big results in inspiring, balancing, and empowering their teams.**

The three-week “kickstarter” is a creatively crafted experience that combines a bold brand, thought-provoking questions and concepts, TED Talk-style videos from leadership expert and elite athlete coach Dane Jensen, and leaders' choice of “dares” to put the concepts into practice.

Leaders try new, doable approaches with their teams and reflect on the experience each week. Autonomy remains key: Leaders can spend as little as two minutes if they choose one dare, or up to two hours if they engage with all the content.

Of the leaders who tried the program,

94.7%

recommend *Rise & Thrive* to their peers

84.5%

say they gained new tools



The Pillars of *Rise & Thrive*



Game-changing leaders
play to win.

Inspire

Establish and
maintain team
effectiveness, trust
and inclusivity

Balance

Effectively **prioritize**
workload for your hybrid
and remote teams

Empower

Focus on **developing** your
hybrid & remote teams

Leaders who sign up for *Rise & Thrive* receive new, fresh, eye-opening content over three weeks. Each week focuses on a key aspect of leading in the new normal: Inspire, Balance, and Empower.

We Dare You to
Build Knowledge and Skill

The Hero's Journey
Luke Skywalker had Yoda. Cinderella, a fairy godmother. The Karate kid, Mr. Miyagi. We all need someone to help us get to the next level. Learn your team members' goals and use your unique skills to help them be a hero of their own story.

Dare: Each week, deliver a suggestion to a team member to help them get one step closer to their goal. Whenever you read a good article, hear about a new STA event (cross-disciplinary), or get an email about a new Bayer program, ask yourself if someone on your team could benefit. It's all up to the team member to take the next step, but you can use your knowledge as a leader to show them a path forward.

Reward: Getting in the habit of investing in your team's development not only improves employee engagement but is also one of the most fulfilling things a leader can do. When you help someone succeed, you get to become part of their story.

Empower / RESTRICTED - Page 18

Help employees on their journey, leaders will. This dare challenges leaders to get in the habit of sharing opportunities and resources that connect to their team members' goals.

How many people on your team say that they trust you?

THIS IS ANONYMOUS! PLEASE ANSWER HONESTLY 🙊

All of them **Some of them** **I don't know?**

Starting the week, leaders are greeted by a thought-provoking quiz—a quick way for them to self-assess their performance and build their motivation to learn more.

Time management is a trap

Balance is all about time management—or is it? In this upbeat, just-for-Bayer, TED Talk-style video, Dane Jensen challenges old wisdom about efficiency. The solution to infinite demands isn't time management: It's reducing the volume of *distractions, decisions, and tasks*.

Leaders have shared how *Rise & Thrive* helped them “reset” their drive and enthusiasm for their teams. The ability to retain top talent, handle difficult conversations, and prioritize were top of mind, and *Rise & Thrive* made leaders think differently about these game-changing skills.

Rise & Thrive has been a remarkable success. Bayer is building on that momentum with an incredible speaker series featuring Olympic gold medalist Dominique Dawes, and James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*.

“

As a manager, I have been to training classes, I have read 100s of management books and I have had a personalized coach, but [*Rise & Thrive*] are the most articulate, bite-sized and helpful real-time management training/coaching pieces that I have ever had. Each one has inspired me to go back, slow down and focus once again on doing the basics well. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

”

**—Bayer leader
and Rise & Thrive participant**



Further Reading: Learning Case Studies

Innovative and Inclusive Learning Programs

Five unique challenges and solutions to spark creative thought for your training portfolio. Download this eBook to explore examples of rapid, just-in-time learning; design thinking-inspired solution design; representation, diversity, and inclusion; storytelling and scenario-based learning; and virtual learning journeys.

[READ THE EBOOK](#)



EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR SCREEN-FATIGUED LEARNERS: THREE SUPPORTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN TECHNIQUES

By **Hanan Harb, SweetRush Learning Evangelist**

Here's some data that likely won't come as a shock: **Studies from the past two years indicate a 60-70% increase in screen time for adults^{12,13}**. (As for kids and their screens, I'm sure my fellow guilt-ridden parents can agree, "we don't talk about screen time...no, no, no...")

We may fight it, but screens have become unavoidable. They're how we catch up with family and friends, exercise, unwind, and, let's face it, kill time.

And, as all of us in L&D know well, screens are increasingly an essential tool for work and learning. For remote workers, back-to-back video calls became the norm. And that can leave us feeling drained.¹⁴

12 <https://deadline.com/2021/10/screen-time-up-sixty-percent-covid-pandemic-1234855072/figures-reveal/?sh=2c3178c23104>

13 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markbeech/2020/03/25/covid-19-pushes-up-internet-use-70-streaming-more-than-12-first-figures-reveal/?sh=2c3178c23104>

14 <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>

15 <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>

In the quick pivot to virtual learning, long webinars and online content became the needed temporary fix. But a temporary fix doesn't have to be permanent—and it shouldn't be. Not if we're empathizing with our learners, who say they are exhausted. It's the perfect time to consider new and creative ways to engage through *human-centered* and *inclusive* learning design.

252%

increase in time spent in meetings for the average Teams user since February 2020

32%

increase in chats sent per person since March 2020

Source: Microsoft, 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report¹⁵

Consider these approaches that are working for us and our clients:

1 Complement Content with Communities

Remote and hybrid learners aren't lacking content. What we are lacking, and what many are asking for, is *connection*. **Learning communities can foster the social benefits of in-person learning: collaboration, innovation, and encouragement.** They bring together diverse folks to share authentic perspectives.



As part of my SweetRush onboarding, I signed up for a group called *36 Questions*. A very small group of colleagues from different departments meet together weekly with the sole purpose of connection. This supportive “crew” provides a safe space to share and grow.

How to get started:



Create a safe practice space for cohorts to learn together. Learners come to the cohort to put their new skills into practice before trying in the high-stakes “real world.”



When possible, **include alums of the program as cohort coaches** to add another layer to social learning by offering guidance and encouragement.

We used this approach for a global client’s manager learning journey using gamification. Cohorts work through branching scenarios of challenging conversations together in real-time to practice difficult situations that they would face as managers. Unlike the real world, they have their fellow learners’ support, immediate feedback, and the chance to try again.

2 Ritualize Learning through Artifacts

Rituals¹⁶, like celebrating birthdays or other important milestones, are part of every culture. So, why not ritualize the process of learning itself? And rituals involve creating artifacts¹⁷, which are a physical representation of what you’re celebrating (for example, a piece of cake from a birthday party or a thoughtful gift you receive). This makes the event memorable.

SweetRush Creative Director
Hernan Muñoz explains,

“

An artifact is something you hold sacred. It’s a symbol you put significance on. It gives importance to a moment. If you introduce an artifact, it becomes easier to rally people around it...Rather than putting the responsibility solely on your facilitator, it shifts some of that to the artifact.

”

Some food for thought:



Task a cohort completing their journey to leave words of encouragement for the next cohort that is just beginning. While the two cohorts are on different tracks, one cheers on the next, which benefits both groups.



To really make it a memorable learning journey, our Director of Learning Experience Design Clare Dygert suggests incorporating a tree or bush planting ritual that participants can do individually on their own schedule. From the ritual, the artifact will bloom to serve as a reminder of the experience. And it’s sustainable!

¹⁶ <https://www.ritualdesignlab.org/>

¹⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_artifact_\(education\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_artifact_(education))



3 Prioritize Time for Pauses, Reflection, and Rest

If you work out at the gym, do you do 1,000 reps non-stop? No; that would be dangerous! So, why then, do we expect to use our brains nonstop with little rest¹⁸? Studies¹⁹ prove that rest is essential in learning new skills and making memories. As learning designers, we need to create brain space for learners.

20 minutes
in nature can help
lower stress hormone levels

Source: *Frontiers in Psychology*²⁰

A couple tips:



Build rest into your learning journey to help learners convert new skills to long-term memory.



Encourage learners to reflect outside if possible. Getting outside and into nature²¹ (even just 20 minutes) can be the antidote to screen stress.

Screens are, for better or worse, a fact of life. And in our distracted world, we're competing for learner attention. But people want to learn, and they want to be engaged while learning. Put the learner at the heart of your design and start with empathy—you'll be amazed by the creative and unexpected ideas that emerge.

18 <https://ideas.ted.com/the-7-types-of-rest-that-every-person-needs/amp/>

19 <https://neurosciencenews.com/rest-learning-memory-11073/>

20 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00722/full>

21 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/a-20-minute-nature-break-relieves-stress>

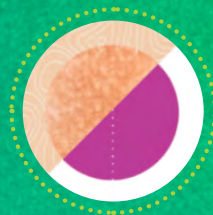
FURTHER READING ON LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN



Be Our Guest: A Service Design Approach to Learner Experience

A service design approach can help you create self-directed learning that maximizes your learners' time and attention. These four guiding principles will help you anticipate your learners' needs and offer them a great learner experience (LX) that prioritizes their needs, comfort, and enjoyment.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



Create Impactful Virtual Training Experiences for Asynchronous Learning

As more hybrid workplaces embrace zoom- and video-free days, we reflect on what this means for L&D and the asynchronous learner. Discover how to design impactful virtual training experiences for your asynchronous learners with these six tips.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



SECTION 4

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR *L&D IN 2022*

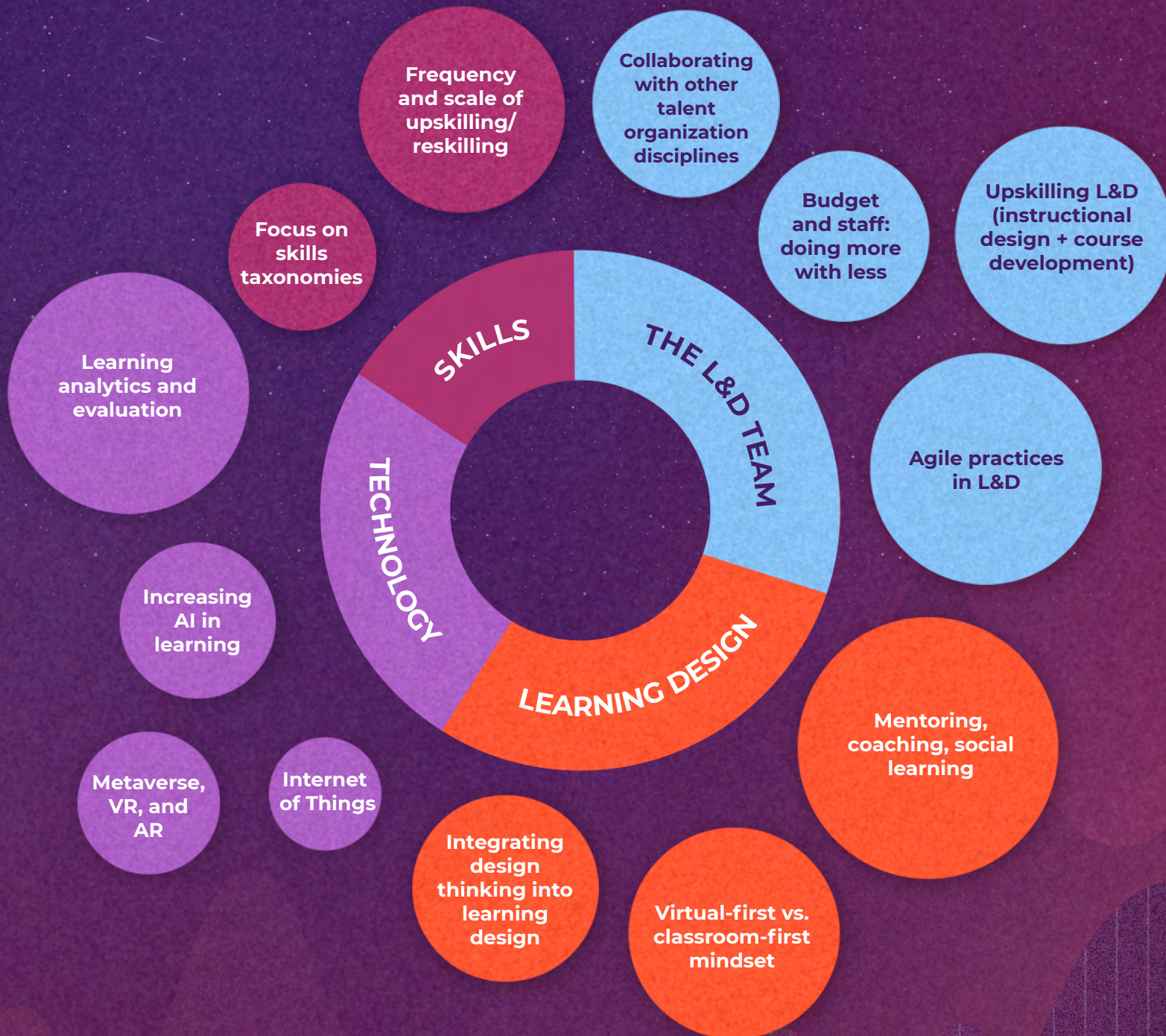
New strategies, techniques, technologies, processes, and tools—L&D is no stranger to experimenting with new ways to be more efficient and effective. It's not always easy given the constraints of time, staff, and deadlines, but if there's one thing learning professionals love, it's learning!

In this section, we'll share what L&D pros will be doing more of—and are excited to learn about—in 2022, how mentoring and coaching can integrate into learning programs, and insights into the brave new world of the metaverse.



WHAT L&D WILL BE DOING MORE OF IN 2022

We asked, *What will your learning organization be doing more of in 2022?* The results are an inspiring map of possibilities for the future of our craft.



Making learning more **social and collaborative** through mentoring, coaching, and peer learning ranked high for our respondents. SweetRush's Chief Possibilities Officer Erin Krebs explores this trend with actionable tips for making these programs work at scale. [Read more.](#)

Learning **analytics and evaluation** was another area of focus. If you missed Emma Klosson's take on how to make this achievable, be sure to check it out. [Read more.](#)

A common theme that emerged in our follow-up question is the **high level of competition** for mindshare—as one respondent said, they'll be doing more of “whatever will shift the needle for learning and improve the learning culture, given the battle with competing priorities.”

And a similar sentiment from another L&D professional:

“
We would be interested in learning more about how we can keep the learners engaged...when there are so many other things competing for attention.

”

This is a real challenge, and one that can be solved through **empathy**: understanding learners' needs, preferences, and desires, giving them choice and autonomy, and using human-centered learning design practices. [Read more about four truths of human-centered learning design: it's accessible, inclusive, enjoyable, and happens in the flow of work.](#)

SCALING SUPPORT: 5 WAYS TO MAKE MENTORING AND COACHING A SUCCESS

By **Erin Krebs,**
SweetRush Chief Possibilities Officer

(Author's note: We're using “mentoring” in this section to include both mentoring and coaching—our recommendations apply to both.)

If you've ever tried to be great at something and succeeded, chances are you've had a mentor along your path to greatness. We've all (perhaps recently) learned that a three-minute YouTube tutorial does not an expert make. **Skill development and sustained behavior change require nudges of support from experts**, who assess our performance and pepper our learning with tips and shortcuts: “a little more of this and a little less of that.”

We know this to be true, and yet in workplace learning, we so often omit this all-too-critical component. You'd never suggest your neighbor's teenage son learn to drive solely from VR training. Why should leadership skills be any different? Humans learn from humans, and we're evolutionarily wired to do so.

The challenge is scale. The logistics of mobilizing people can feel daunting and the ROI uncertain. But done well, mentoring programs can be easier and more impactful than you think



Consider these approaches that are working for our clients:

1 Tap into the current flow of work.

Mentoring is happening constantly, and we're most successful if we can work *with* the norms instead of trying to create new ones. Assess your business to identify day-to-day moments where this interaction already does, or easily could, occur. What parts of your organization do this well? What makes it work?

2 **Hold to a (higher) standard.** Great mentors can reduce costs: losses from performance errors and the need for investment in formal learning. But bad mentoring can cost you, and not just financially. Make it clear what great looks like. Mentoring and performance guides for mentors and mentees can set and reinforce standards for best-practice behaviors that support skill development. Include specific behavioral outcomes of the mentoring program, the program duration and structure, and guidance for conversation starters, activities, and performance demos. We love using Articulate Rise as a fast way to create effective and interactive mentoring guides.

3 **Give it credit(ability).** We all want results we can see. (Like that certificate hanging on the wall at just the right angle for our webcam... *Why yes, I did complete XYZ program at ABC amazing institution, I'm so glad you asked.*) Credentials for demonstrating skills are becoming more meaningful—skills passports are a hot topic this year. Design your

mentoring program to align with specific performance standards and award learners a certificate, “credit,” or badge to display on LinkedIn, profile pages, and resumes. And do the same for mentors, to acknowledge the value they bring and incentivize them to devote the time.

4 **Use it as an equalizer.** Formal mentoring programs can be used to combat inequalities in specific populations; you can facilitate matches that might not happen on their own due to affinity bias. Intentionally pair underrepresented or minority team members with mentors to whom they might not otherwise have access.

5 **Leverage tech to make it easier.** Digital mentoring guides can be accessed via an LMS or Microsoft Teams. Nudges (email, text, pop-ups on the intranet) can be sent to mentors and mentees to urge collaboration. Home-grown solutions or platforms such as Chronus can be used to pair up mentors and mentees based on interests, level of expertise, and geographic/time zone proximity, and to collect data on what's working and what needs improvement. Tech also provides a means for mentoring even if the mentor and mentee are not in the same physical location: For example, quick Zoom calls to calibrate, shared documents in MS Teams or Google Docs to allow feedback and screen sharing to guide someone through an online task.

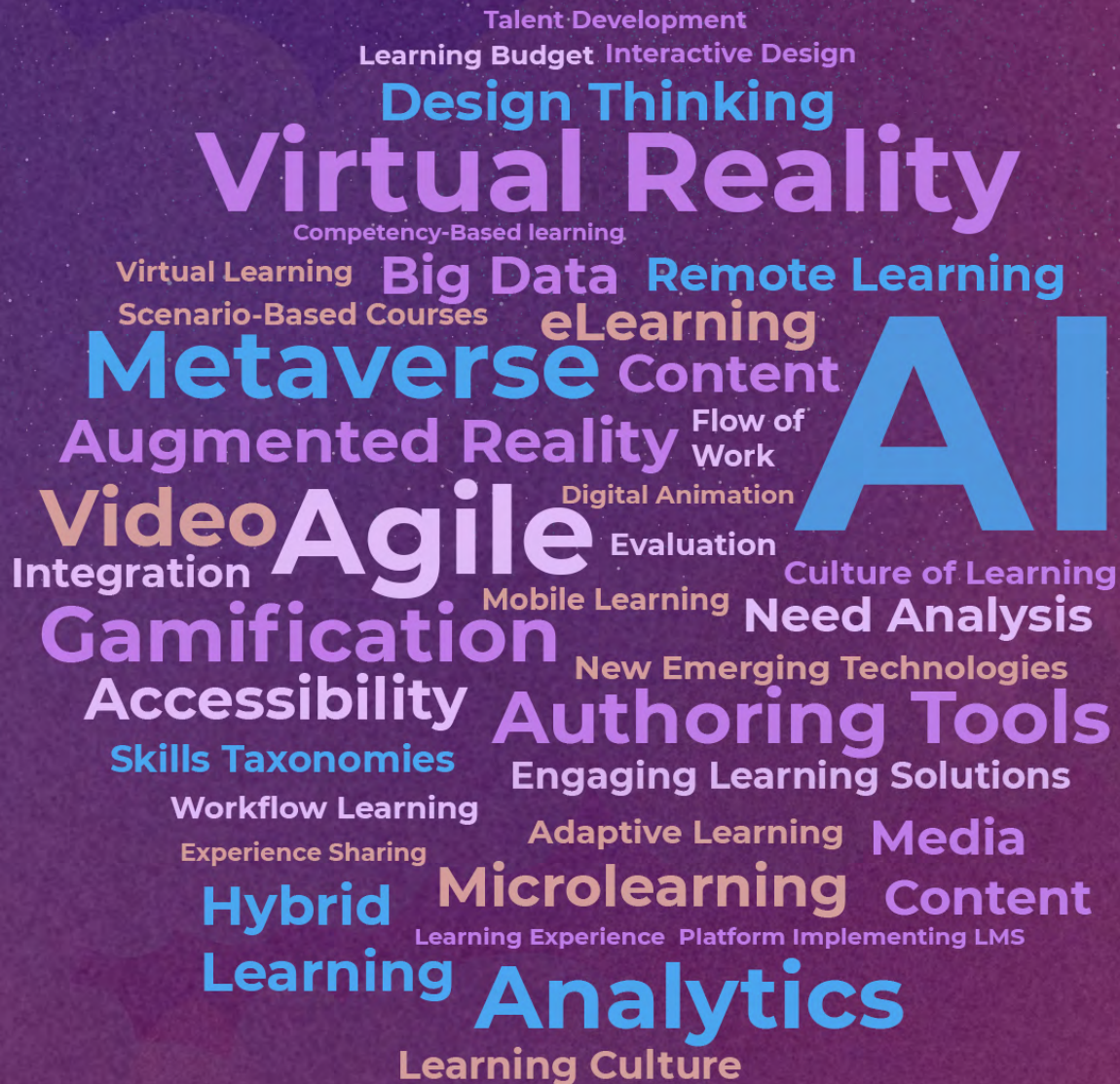
For many, the past two years have heightened awareness of our need for meaningful human connection. **Yes, making mentoring an integral part of learning programs can help improve and accelerate application of skills, but it's also a gift, given and received—a powerful relationship that can be life-changing and life-spanning.**

That's an investment worth making.



WHAT L&D PROS ARE EXCITED TO LEARN IN 2022

We asked, *what are you most excited to learn about in 2022?*
Our community of learning professionals came through with
some great topics to explore!



THE METAVERSE: A NEW REALITY FOR LEARNING

An Interview with Adrian Soto, SweetRush
Director of XR and Immersive Tech

Call it “metaverse fever”—Facebook’s rebrand to Meta Platforms and news of its \$10B investment in the technology²² generated tons of interest overnight. Accenture Interactive’s Fjord Trends Report says “it’s evolving digital culture and offering people and brands a new place to interact, create, consume, and earn.”²³ Microsoft’s 2022 Work Trends Index states that over half of the Gen Zers they surveyed “envision doing some of their work in the metaverse in the next two years.”²⁴

Business leaders, including many of our clients and friends in L&D, are trying to sort through the hope and the hype, starting with, **What is the metaverse, and what does it mean for how we work, collaborate, and learn?**

Our expert in these matters is Adrian Soto, SweetRush’s Director of XR and Immersive Tech, and we sat down to ask him a few of these burning questions.

So, what exactly is the metaverse?

Adrian: I’ll start with what it’s not—the misconception is that virtual reality and augmented reality are the metaverse,

which is not true. But they can play an important role in a metaverse. I say “a” metaverse, because another misconception is that there is just one single metaverse; again, not true. There are, and can be, many metaverses. In the end, one or a few will likely emerge as the most popular ones, but they won’t be the only ones. And finally, another misconception is that the metaverse is a brand new thing, and that’s also not true.

In fact, metaverses have been around for a while, though they’re mostly known to gamers. Fortnite is one of the biggest metaverses; Second Life and World of Warcraft are others.

“
**They are essentially
multiplayer worlds that you
can enter into, interact with
others, purchase things,
and, often, create things and
potentially sell them.**
”

That’s one of the definitions of a metaverse.

Most people have accessed the existing metaverses with computers or video game consoles. Now, we can use VR and AR headsets and wearables to enter metaverses designed for these devices.

As we know, Meta (formerly Facebook) is creating a metaverse, Horizon Worlds. They’re going to, in theory, make it very easy to join, and they’re betting on VR as the way you’ll access it, with their Oculus hardware.

22 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/technology/meta-facebook-earnings-metaverse.html>

23 <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/interactive/fjord-trends-2022>

24 <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>



Should L&D leaders care about the metaverse? Join a metaverse? Build their own?

Adrian: All of this should be driven by your business priorities and what challenges you may be facing with your employees, especially if they are remote or hybrid. Accenture built its own corporate metaverse²⁵ because they have a lot of employees, they need to attract a lot of new hires every year, and all of them need to excel at collaboration remotely. Clearly they saw building a metaverse as a path to meeting these business needs—and they're a technology-centric company, so it makes sense for them to be at the forefront of this.

As with any new technology, when it comes to our world of L&D, CLOs will need to decide if it's worth it or just a shiny object at the current stage of maturity. The important thing to note is that **you don't need a metaverse to start using virtual reality and augmented reality for learning or collaboration.**

I strongly believe that's the logical place to start, and the studies exist that show the efficacy of these technologies for learning.

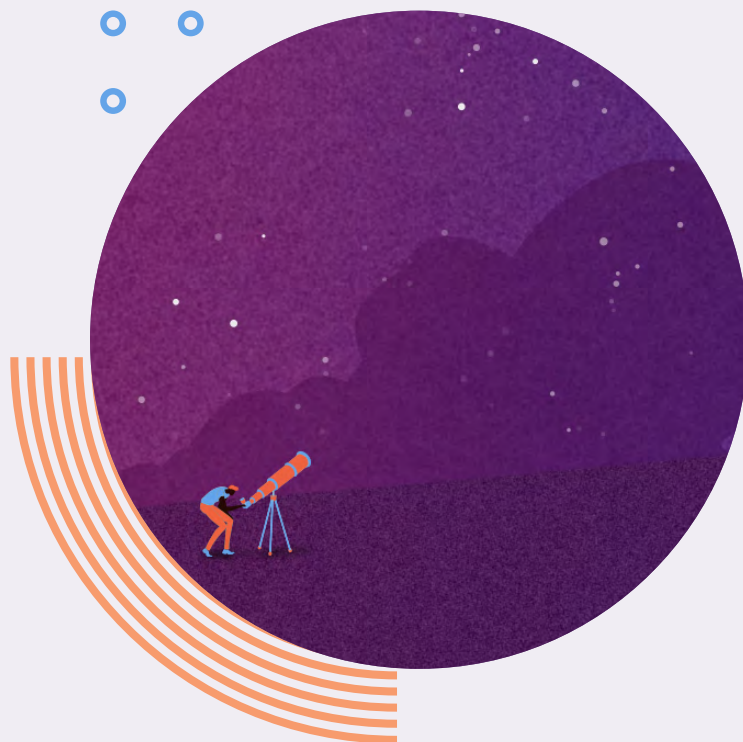
What's the state of virtual reality for learning?

Adrian: The past few years have been about creating the proof of concept, validating the technology, developing processes and being able to clearly define expectations. This has been our focus and experience at SweetRush and I believe we mirror the technologies' maturity generally. All of that has been accomplished. **Learning professionals now need to understand how to create content for this platform and really take advantage of it, which again is where we have been applying our research efforts.**

I see it as similar to the way eLearning came about—there was a lot of experimentation in the beginning and not all of it was solid in terms of instructional design. People needed to learn, share what was working, and improve.

The same thing needs to happen for VR, but there are new considerations. With eLearning we have visual and auditory information; in VR we have a 360° immersive space. We need to design great learning experiences that don't overwhelm learners, that present content in the right way.

To give you an example of what I mean, consider 360 spatial audio, where the sound changes as you move your head—imagine using that in safety training where learners need to listen for specific sounds in an environment. Another area of exploration is how realistic an environment needs to be before it actually becomes a point of distraction.



25 <https://fortune.com/2022/04/11/accenture-builds-corporate-metaverse>

It's really bringing together user experience, learning design, and technology in a new way.

And there are lots of considerations:



DIGITAL ASSET OPTIMIZATION



COGNITIVE OVERLOAD



DEPLOYMENT



SCALABILITY



COST



MEASURING ROI

It's complex, but it doesn't need to be confusing. This is an exciting time and we love sharing with clients to help them understand the best way into this for them.

What's exciting about VR for learning that you see coming in the near future?

Adrian: Multi-learner experiences where we can bring small groups together in VR to learn together are definitely on the horizon; we've built this technology and we have some clients exploring use cases. The next step is the potential to replace ILT with **VR-ILT** in some cases and give the instructor the ability to control variables in the room.

I'm excited to bring more features that are relevant to learning into VR; for example, **how do you take notes? What's the best way to get help if you're stuck? How can you access outside information relevant to what you're learning?**

As my colleague Gregg Kendrick says,

“

The less you are aware of the tech, the more you can enjoy it.

”

What we're reaching for is making experiences more seamless, more enjoyable, and really effective at meeting the business and learning objectives. We're doing it now, and it's just thrilling to be helping shape this new way to engage and change the behavior of learners.



CONCLUSION

EVOLVING OUR L&D CRAFT, *TOGETHER*

L&D professionals are no longer simply in the business of training. We're helping to create agile, adaptable, and resilient workforces. We're supporting business strategy and transformation. And we're using our craft to serve our people so that every individual can discover and unlock their full potential.

That's the power and impact of learning and development today.

Yes, we have some big challenges to face—and we can see them as exciting opportunities. Collaboration, creativity, expanding our toolkit with new technologies, and opening our minds and hearts to new solutions will help us evolve the L&D craft together.

It would be our privilege and honor to help you and your organization with any aspect of learning and development, from strategy to implementation. Please reach out to us anytime; we'd love to hear more about your challenge and discover how we can support you. And even if it's not about working together but about talking shop and sharing ideas, we'd love to hear from you!

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

Or email us at info@sweetrush.com.

Wishing you all the best in 2022 and beyond,
Danielle Hart and the SweetRush Team



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Empower Your People. Improve Performance. Make a Positive Impact.

WITH A COLLABORATIVE, INNOVATIVE PARTNER YOU CAN TRUST



CUSTOM LEARNING

Bespoke solutions are designed to motivate, build skills, and change behavior. Give us the opportunity to show you why we're judged the best.



SWEETRUSH®



TALENT SOLUTIONS

Need temporary talent? We understand your needs and can quickly match you with the right L&D professional—because we do this work, too.



TRANSFORMING LEADERS & CULTURE

Investing in our culture has been the secret to our success. Discover how we can help you create high-performing leaders and teams.



CODESIGNSM

High-impact, complex challenge? Talk to us about CoDesign, our design thinking process. (It's disruptive.)



XR

VR, AR, and immersive learning are a new world of opportunity. Curious? Confused? Let us be your guide and show you how these technologies can work for you.



GOOD THINGS

Nonprofits, we stand in awe of what you do. Let us show you how learning and communication can amplify your impact.

Get in touch. It would make our day to hear from you.





SWEETRUSH®

27 Brandon Hall Group
Excellence Awards 2021

22 Gold!
Top Winner



LEARN MORE





IN OUR CLIENTS' *WORDS*



**They are professional,
creative, resourceful with
high quality delivery and
a great team spirit!**

“

They **stay on top of the latest trends in their field**, hire diverse talents, are very responsive to client needs/feedback, and they have the courage also to stand up for what they believe in. It was a true joy to work with them as we would go through the ups and downs of our projects with a 'glass half full' attitude, making sure it was fun to do the work at the same time as we were really focused on a high quality outcome. I would say I think Sweetrush are the best in their field!

”

—L&D Director,
Global Consumer Goods
Corporation

**Amazing final product
and phenomenal people
at SweetRush!**

“

The final product was phenomenal and is **already making an impact**. Every individual I interacted with was knowledgeable, friendly, and genuinely wanted my product to come out as desired. Very much enjoyed working with Sweetrush and will be back for more.

”

—L&D Manager,
US-based Technology
Company

**Fast, fun
and effective!**

“

This company is well-versed in training trends and methods, and they have the creativity to match! I am an extremely satisfied customer, and very happy that I chose to work with SweetRush!

”

—L&D Manager,
Global Food Retail
Group

THANK YOU TO OUR *CONTRIBUTORS!*

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our wonderful and talented SweetRush teammates who gave their time and insights for this report.

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SHARE *THE LOVE*

LET YOUR PEERS AND COLLEAGUES KNOW
ABOUT THIS GREAT RESOURCE



Current Trends in Learning and Development
& Learning Experience Design

L&D CHALLENGES,
LIFE-CENTERED SOLUTIONS:

TRANSFORMING BUSINESS & UNLOCKING *HUMAN POTENTIAL*



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