TRAINING INDUSTRY

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Looking to the Past
to Plan for the Future

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine that your company has just hired a group of new employees. They go through orientation, where they receive their new laptops, find out where they can buy lunch, fill out their human resources (HR) paperwork and receive lots of new company swag. When they start their jobs, learning and development (L&D) takes over to fill in the holes in the competencies the new hires arrived with. Imagine, then, that this group of employees, along with their peers in the rest of the workforce, enjoys a strategically aligned, well-executed and motivating training experience.

Why would you need to imagine this scenario? Because it probably didn't happen at your company — at least not in that way, or that completely. It probably didn't happen at the company next door to yours, either.

It's never that easy. There's always something preventing training from having the impact it's designed to. And because companies rely on training programs to upskill employees and promote a learning culture, when L&D doesn't function effectively, there can be repercussions for employee retention and overall company goals.

If you're like most learning leaders, you face several challenges in developing and implementing effective training programs. In your most frustrating moments, you may ask, exasperated, "Is this normal?" This report will help you answer that question. Based on 14 different data collection efforts from 2015 to 2019, it summarizes the responses of 3,656 learning leaders about their most common challenges, defining and describing them in three categories: training strategy, implementation and learning behavior.

If you find yourself nodding along with the first pages in this report, continue reading, because we'll leave you with recommendations on how to tackle the most common challenges learning leaders face when it comes to supporting learning and improving performance at their organizations. You'll be able to use this report to anticipate new challenges you might encounter in the course of growing your training organization's reach and effectiveness — and respond accordingly.

> "There's always something preventing training from having the impact it's designed to."

THE TOP CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNING LEADERS

Most, if not all, L&D organizations face at least some obstacles to successful training. In fact, nearly two-thirds of companies identified between two and five challenges in their training initiatives, with an average of 3.9 challenges (Figure 1). Only 2% of all the companies surveyed identified zero challenges, meaning that the other 98% of companies experienced at least one challenge to deploying training (Figure 2). The data also show that in general, the majority of companies juggle between two and five different challenges at the same time. This finding underscores what many learning leaders understand intuitively: that "business as usual" for an L&D function often means contending with an array of problems.

Figure 1.
Total Number of Identified Challenges Per Company
2015-2019
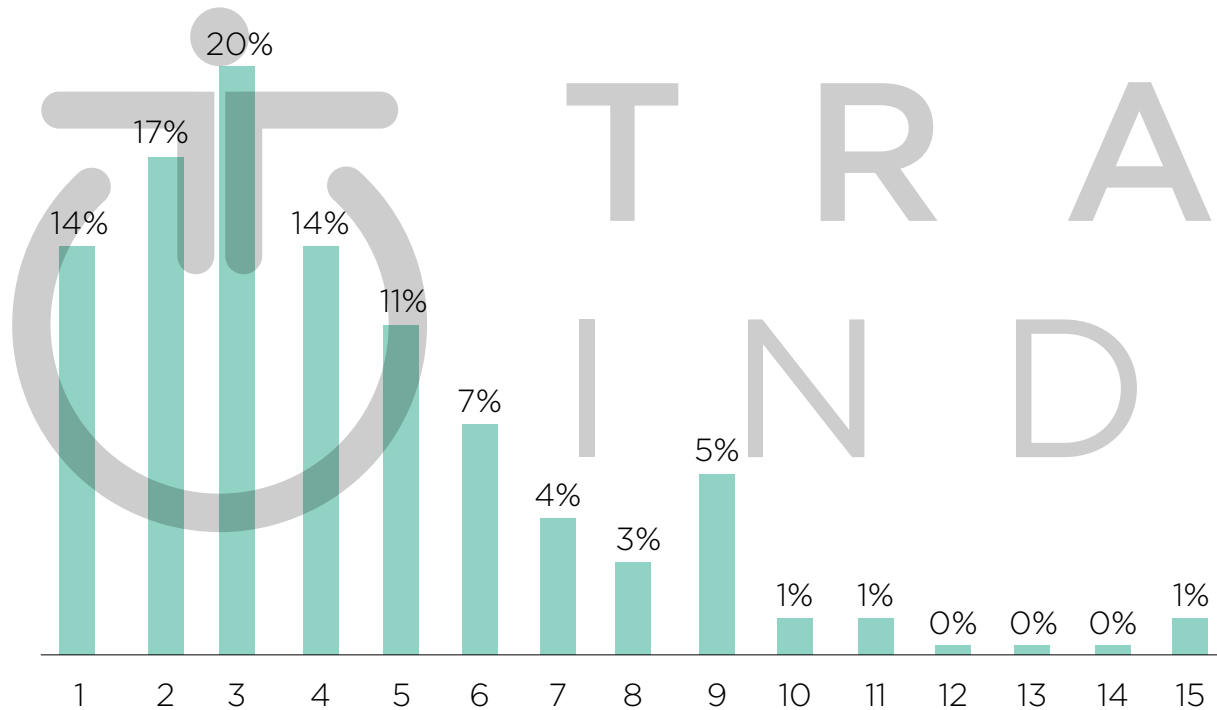
N=3,656

Figure 2.
Boxplot of Total Number of Identified Challenges per Company
2015-2019

Figure 3.
Challenges to Deploying Training
2015-2019

Challenges to Deploying Training bar chart:

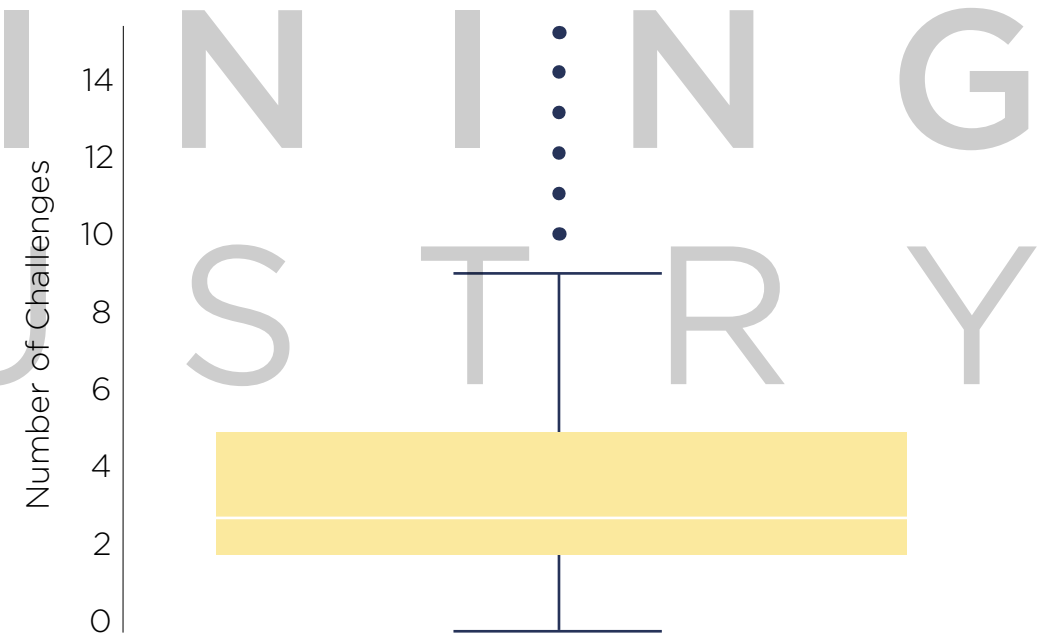| Challenge	Percentage
Enterprise training consistency	38%
Limited resources (e.g., time, staff, budget)	37%
Evaluating training effectiveness	34%
Sustaining the impact of training	31%
Lack of leadership support	29%
Ensuring that training content is relevant	26%
Problems defining proper evaluation metrics	26%
Low learner engagement	25%
Globally dispersed training delivery	22%
Securing an internal L&D champion	21%
Low learner attendance	19%
Shortage of dedicated training facilities	19%
Consistency of the learner experience	17%
Aligning training to company goals	16%
Low use of e-learning modalities	14%

N=3,656

The most common challenges (Figure 3) learning leaders face involve ensuring that training content and delivery are consistent across the enterprise, including in different departments and geographies; dealing with limited resources of time, staff and budget; and evaluating and demonstrating the effectiveness of training through metrics such as return on investment (ROI). In other words, the most common obstacles that L&D functions grapple with involve being consistent, resourceful and accountable. Of course, while these three challenges are the most prominent obstacles identified by learning leaders over the past five years, they are certainly not the only important ones, and this report will explore each challenge in greater detail.

It is also important to point out that these challenges don't occur in isolation or in series. In fact, most companies deal with several challenges simultaneously, and some challenges can be exacerbating factors for others. For example, having limited resources likely also means that a training organization does not have the staff or the budget to provide sufficient dedicated training facilities, while having learners dispersed around the globe will make it more challenging to ensure that training is consistent across locations. Similarly, it will be difficult for learning leaders to evaluate training effectiveness without first being able to define proper evaluation metrics.

"
The most common obstacles that L&D functions grapple with involve being consistent, resourceful and accountable."

Share this quote

CATEGORIES OF CHALLENGES TO TRAINING

With this extensive list of obstacles, where should L&D begin? We can group these challenges into three categories to facilitate the discussion:

STRATEGIC/SYSTEMIC

Strategic/systemic challenges relate to how an organization's governance and structure impacts its ability to deliver training and includes challenges such as securing leadership support and deploying training to a dispersed group of learners. Because this category involves factors that do not stem directly from the training itself, it's easy to overlook this category, and it is possible that a company's L&D function can operate without adequately addressing these challenges. The more important —

and seldom-asked — question is whether it can operate well — and the answer is, without the support of the leadership team or alignment with business goals (another strategic/systemic challenge), a training organization is unlikely to be very successful.

LEARNER-RELATED

Learner-related challenges are defined by the source of the challenge: the learner. For all the attention we pay to the form of training and its desired objectives, it doesn't matter what the training is about or how well it's designed if learners aren't engaging with it. Again, it is possible that an L&D

function can be humming along with day-to-day operations and fail to meet the needs of learners — but if that's the case, then what's the point?

IMPLEMENTATION

Challenges to training implementation involve inputs and outputs such as L&D resources and learning metrics. In contrast to the other categories, some implementation challenges can hamstring an L&D function's ability to operate at all. For instance, without a budgetary allocation toward training or sufficient L&D staff, a training organization will not be able to meet its most basic goals.

Again, most organizations face multiple challenges — and our research also found that many face two or more challenges within the same category. Figure 4 shows the frequency with which challenges in each of the categories defined above were identified by learning leaders. This data makes sense, considering how different challenges can affect each other, and does not make the task of a learning leader any easier. For instance, a company experiencing a problem around implementing training may be dealing with larger L&D issues that show up in the form of several related challenges. So, while learning leaders may need to address each individual challenge in isolation, it is likely that they did not manifest in isolation.

> "Most organizations face two or more related challenges at the same time."

Before working to overcome these challenges, it's important to understand them. With that in mind, we explore each challenge in more depth in the next section.

Figure 4.
Percentage of Companies Identifying Challenges by Category

CATEGORY

STRATEGIC/SYSTEMIC
- 1.0%
- 9.4%
- 37.1%
- 4.8%
- 21.4%

LEARNER-RELATED
- 1.0%
- 6.4%
- 33.8%
- 1.6%
- 19.8%

IMPLEMENTATION
- 1.7%
- 13.5%
- 32.8%
- 5.3%
- 24.3%

NUMBER OF CHALLENGES PER CATEGORY

5 4 3 2 1
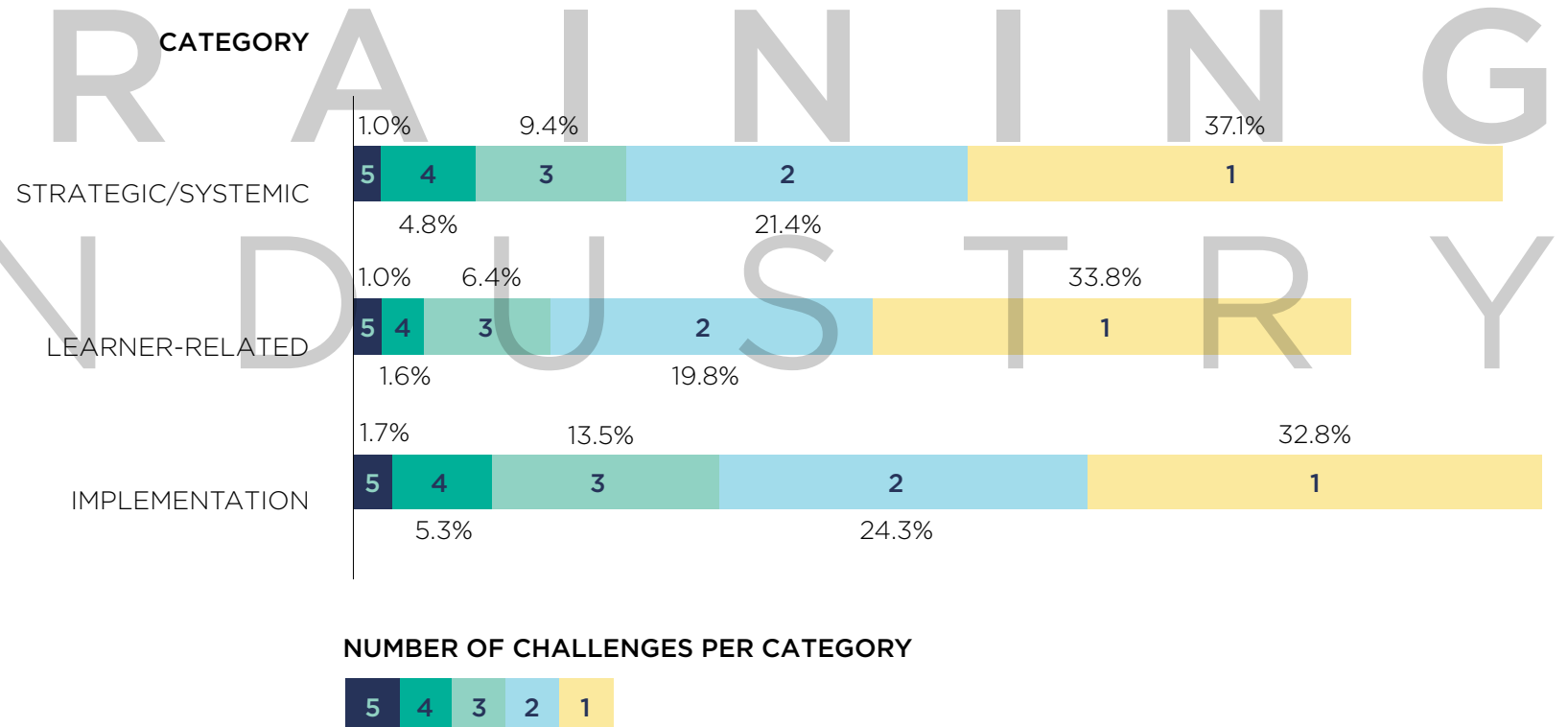
STRATEGIC/SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Strategic/systemic challenges relate to the organization's governance and structure, particularly their ability to support consistent training, the delivery of training to a global learning audience, lack of leadership support and prioritization of training, and the alignment of training to business goals. Let's explore each specific challenge in turn.

TRAINING CONSISTENCY ACROSS DEPARTMENTS AND REGIONS

In our global environment, employees often work from home or in many different locations. Ensuring that employees receive comparable training experiences across geographies and whether online or in person is challenging — and imperative.

In this context, "consistency" does not refer to one pattern of providing training or to providing the same training, in the same way, over and over, never changing or improving the process. That type of consistency is counterproductive. The challenge learning leaders face is the task of providing consistent content and experiences across technologies, audiences, geographies, functions and roles:

INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (ILT) VERSUS VIRTUAL INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (VILT)

Many organizations turn in-person training into VILT so distributed team members can learn the same content. When doing so, it's important to make sure that the VILT provides the same level of quality and makes the same impact as the in-person training.

GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE

Keeping the message the same across different languages doesn't just require a translator; it also means taking into account cultural differences and references as well as other localization considerations, such as examples and case studies, dates and number formats, and even time zones and work schedules.

FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCES

When delivering content such as compliance training across different functions, what needs to stay the same, and what needs to change according to learners' job functions and roles? For example, training on hazardous materials might only be needed for certain manufacturing roles (depending on regulations), but training on harassment should be consistent across departments.

DELIVERING TRAINING TO A GLOBALLY DISPERSED WORKFORCE AND CUSTOMER BASE

Delivering training to a globally dispersed learner base is challenging for additional reasons, not least of which is logistics. Having a solid global training delivery strategy can be a lurking "gotcha" for some L&D functions, because the process of navigating an initiative like a multinational rollout of training can uncover a host of problems stemming from scenarios like these:

- Rolling out an initiative in multiple countries in parallel, which can require the coordination of global teams with multiple local resources.

- Adapting training materials to meet the needs of a particular employee demographic while adhering to international legal requirements.

- Managing learner expectations and communicating intended learning outcomes across borders.

- Creating a central repository of training materials with a method for escalating questions and concerns.

- Mechanisms for post-rollout follow-up and the measurement of training impact.

> "
> Most training leaders strive to create a culture of learning in their organizations."

LACK OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND PRIORITIZATION OF TRAINING

"Get buy-in" has practically become a mantra for L&D professionals looking for that proverbial seat at the table. For leaders to include training in the budget, for an organizational culture to embrace learning, for training leaders to know what L&D programs must address, for learners to apply training on the job and for learners to believe that training is important, executives must support and prioritize it. Without that cooperation, it can be difficult for L&D to make inroads on improving employee proficiency and supporting the goals of the company.

Most training leaders strive to create a culture of learning in their organizations.

In such a culture, employees are not only required to complete training, but they also want to complete training — for their own professional development and because they understand the importance of building skills to impact team and organizational performance. They are constantly on the lookout for resources that will help them do their jobs better, and their managers are available to answer questions, coach them and encourage them to apply what they learn in formal training on the job. Training is considered a benefit, just like health insurance and PTO, and "compliance" is practically an afterthought, since learning is seen as an opportunity, not a mandate.

This type of culture might seem like a pie-in-the-sky aspiration, but it's possible. However, it starts at the top. When leaders demonstrate through words and actions that they not only support employees' learning but participate in training themselves, it becomes a priority at every other level of the company — and resources follow.

SECURING AN INTERNAL L&D CHAMPION FOR TRAINING

Among leadership development researchers and practitioners, particularly those focused on improving equity, sponsorship has become a popular topic. These experts believe that having a sponsor — a decision-maker or influencer who not only helps guide a person's development but also promotes him or her with stakeholders — is key to an individual's advancement inside an organization. Sponsors can serve as mentors, but they are also an advocate during conversations where career decisions are made — when a promotion is available or a spot on an important, high-visibility project comes up.

Similarly, one of the primary ways learning leaders can ensure training is a strategic priority is to find an internal champion — an executive or other leader who understands the importance of training and is willing to advocate for it with his or her peers. A champion can be anyone from a vice president to the CEO, but it must be someone who has the ear of the leadership team that makes decisions regarding resource allocation. The champion also demonstrates to the rest of the organization that learning is important by sharing his or her experiences with training programs and communicating success stories from across the workforce. Without an internal champion, it can be difficult for learning leaders to make training an organizational priority and, on a more practical level, receive the resources they need to deliver essential programs.

MENTORS & INFLUENCERS

EXECUTIVES

INTERNAL LEADERS

Training might help individual employees develop interesting new skills, but it's not very useful to the organization unless it can help it achieve its key strategic goals. That's why training alignment — the alignment of training strategy with business strategy — is so critical. For example, if a company's strategy for next year involves launching a new software product, it will, at a minimum, need its software development team to have the competencies needed to create the product, its marketing and sales teams to understand what the product is and who would benefit from buying it, and its legal team to understand any privacy concerns the new product might raise. The trainings organization, then, needs to know what the product is, when the target launch date is, which employees will be involved, and their current levels in those necessary competencies and knowledge areas.

Unless learning leaders are involved in the strategic planning process, they may not be aware of the new product until the last minute, at which time they are scrambling to understand the product themselves, determine learning needs, find the resources to develop and deliver training, and then actually create and implement it. Ideally, the head of the training function is involved in the business' strategic planning process, or at least kept thoroughly updated throughout it. Our research suggests, however, that this involvement is often not the case.

In addition to these strategic and structural challenges, which stem from the organizational level, learners themselves can present some significant challenges to L&D. The next section explores these challenges in more depth.

LEARNER-RELATED CHALLENGES

Challenges related to learners are as the name suggests: They involve the target of L&D — namely, the end users and consumers of all training content. We identified five such challenges in our research; let's discuss each one.

ENSURING THAT TRAINING CONTENT IS RELEVANT

This challenge can have a significant impact on employees and the business. For example, machine learning might be a trending topic, but a machine learning course won't do much good if the learners required to take it work on other types of technology — or if the organization isn't even ready to use machine learning yet. On the other hand, if the company is beginning to develop products that use machine learning, and its software development team is receiving training on other types of programming, it won't be ready to create good, sellable products.

When training content is relevant to the learners consuming it, employees have the most up-to-date skills they need to perform their jobs in a way that helps the organization accomplish its strategic goals. To make sure training is relevant, learning leaders must have a pulse on the organization's strategic plan as well as individual and team learning needs. The content also must be structured and delivered in a way that resonates with learners based on their learning preferences, career goals and day-to-day work challenges.

The abundance of information available on the internet adds to this challenge. Given learners' instant access to YouTube videos, Wikipedia articles and other sources with questionable reliability, learning leaders must be able to provide accurate, relevant content that's just as easily accessible in order for learners to consume the right information. As the workforce evolves, so, too, does the content employees need to learn to effectively do their jobs. Keeping pace with the internet is a challenge, but its one that L&D must be able to overcome to ensure that employees are performing at their best.

> **Most training leaders strive to create a culture of learning in their organizations."**

LOW LEARNER ENGAGEMENT DURING TRAINING

You can bring learners to a training program, but you can't make them learn. Learner motivation is a critical, yet often overlooked, ingredient of a successful learning program. Engaging learners begins in the training development phase: What elements will you include in the training that capture learners' attention, keep them interested and motivate them to continue? Methods such as microlearning and gamification have emerged as popular approaches to engage learners in online and self-paced learning. During instructor-led training, whether in-person or virtual, the onus is on the instructor to use facilitation techniques that engage learners throughout the course, whether lasts a few hours or several days. After training, engagement can continue in the form of reinforcement activities and assessments.

The difficulty of addressing this challenge comes from the fact that much of learner engagement is cumulative: It's not enough for a single training program to be engaging; all training programs must incorporate tools and techniques that engage participants. Employees' experiences as learners and their attitudes toward training require constant tending and unilateral attention. One great program amidst several other subpar programs is seen as an exception rather than reflecting the norm.

LOW LEARNER ATTENDANCE FOR INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING

Previous Training Industry research found that instructor-led classroom training is one of the most impactful methods of delivering training. Of course, it's only impactful if learners actually attend the class. Unlike many online modalities that use a "push" method of delivering content directly to learners, the classroom requires individuals to come to it. There are many reasons that attendance doesn't happen.

Regardless of the reason behind low attendance, in learning and development, if you build it, they won't necessarily come. Strategies such as creating a learning culture; marketing training programs across the organization; and continuously engaging learners before, during and after training are critical to ensuring ILT attendance.

WHY ATTENDANCE DOESN'T HAPPEN

Employees are not engaged with L&D as a whole.

Employees feel training (broadly or the specific classroom program) is not necessary or useful.

Employees don't have enough time to participate in a classroom training because of other work demands.

Employees don't have the support and encouragement of their managers to prioritize training.

The company culture at large discourages taking the time to learn new knowledge and skills.

LOW USE OF E-LEARNING MODALITIES

Human beings are consistent. If attendance is a problem with ILT, "attendance" is also likely a problem with e-learning — and our research confirms this assumption. While e-learning may be easier to "attend" logistically, since most learners don't have to step away from their workspace to participate, organizations still find that they put in a great deal of time and effort building online learning courses and modules — only to find that few employees actually use them. Again, strategies like marketing the e-learning programs, providing incentives for participation and making the content engaging are important to making sure employees are learning the skills and knowledge that will improve their performance.

| MARKET E-LEARNING PROGRAMS | PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION | MAKE CONTENT ENGAGING |

ISSUES ENSURING A CONSISTENT LEARNER EXPERIENCE ACROSS MODALITIES AND DEVICES

As new technologies and learning modalities flood the workplace, providing excellent learner experiences across modalities is a critical challenge. The majority of organizations are using multiple modalities for training delivery. In these organizations, ILT and e-learning typically serve as a foundation, and additional modalities serve to accommodate specific topics and contexts. Different learners in different departments or locations may use different modalities and devices to access training, and it's important for the content to be consistent for each learner. For example, most organizations require all employees to complete certain compliance courses based on industry and government regulations. In this case, they might use classroom training during employee onboarding to introduce the topics and follow up with other modalities annually thereafter. Those other modalities may vary depending on audience; mobile microlearning might work best for a remote sales team or warehouse staff, while desktop e-learning modules might be effective for office personnel. Regardless of modality, L&D must ensure that the training delivered to each of these employees is consistent in both content and quality.

VIRTUAL
INSTRUCTOR-LED

INSTRUCTOR-LED
CLASSROOM

BLENDED
LEARNING

SELF-PACED
E-LEARNING
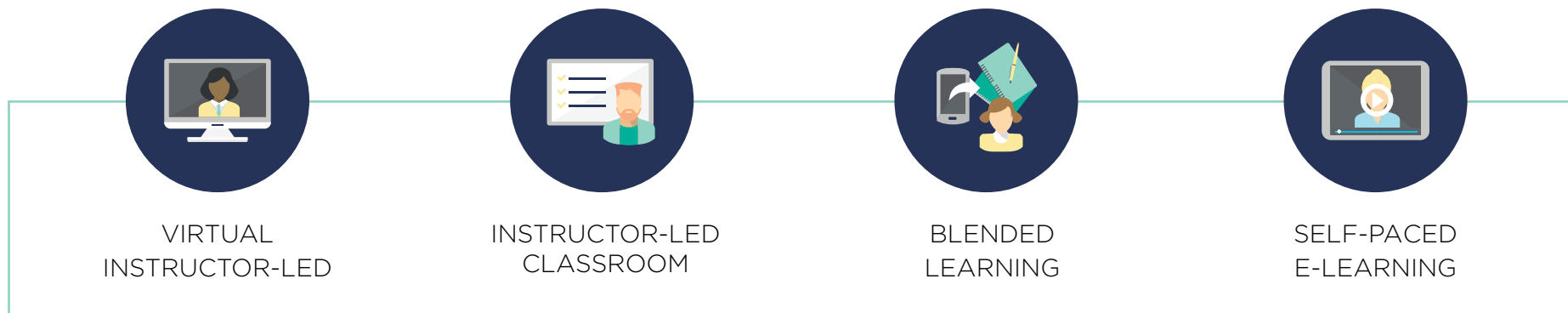
IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Challenges to training implementation primarily involve learning operations: the inputs and outputs of L&D activities, such as resources and learning metrics. Let's explore the ways this category of challenges can manifest itself in the workplace.

DEFINING EVALUATION METRICS

"Return on investment" (ROI) is a hot-button topic, and as we'll discuss shortly, learning leaders are increasingly looking for ways to calculate and prove the value of training to the business. But before they can do so, they must identify the metrics they will use to evaluate training in the first place. Understanding whether training is effective — and at what — can help learning leaders improve their programs and, thus, their impact on the business. Are learners engaging with the program? Are they retaining the information? Are they using what they learned on the job? With the plethora of metrics available to them — everything from participation to learner feedback to assessment results — it can be difficult to determine which will provide the most useful information.

EFFECTIVELY EVALUATING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

L&D professionals know how crucial training is to business performance, but proving its value to other parts of the organization, particularly the executive team, isn't always a walk in the park. Evaluating the effectiveness of training not only helps learning leaders improve their programs but also helps maximize and prove their business impact. The holy grail of evaluation — measuring ROI — is as challenging to define as it is to measure consistently and reliably. Given the wide variety of measurement tools, it's important that learning leaders identify the most appropriate ones to use and understand how to use them effectively. Learning leaders often focus on how to design and deliver a training program and spend comparatively little effort on determining that it had its intended impact. Proving the business impact of training is challenging, but it is critical for the future of learning and, therefore, the future of work.

> "Proving the business impact of training is challenging, but it is critical for the future of learning and, therefore, the future of work."

Share this quote

SUSTAINING THE IMPACT OF TRAINING

Employees may attend a workshop or participate in an e-learning module, but do they apply what they learned on the job, immediately and then weeks or months later? This challenge is twofold: Organizations must put a strategy in place for employees to sustain what they learn, and they must be able to measure whether that sustainment happens. Without a way to reinforce training, cement it as behavior change and then prove the impact of that behavior change on the business, learning leaders will not be able to sustain their programs, either.

SHORTAGE OF DEDICATED TRAINING FACILITIES

Because instructor-led training is still such a popular and effective training modality, organizations must have the space to provide that training. To maximize effectiveness, training should occur in a room that's designed for learning. From having the right technology and accommodations for learners with different needs to enabling natural light and providing space for breaks, the environment where learning occurs is important. It's also a challenge, because many organizations don't have any dedicated space for training, let alone space that encourages effective learning.

This challenge may seem like a relatively minor point in comparison to the other obstacles described in this report, but it can easily upend an otherwise carefully designed training program. How well can learners engage with content if there are constant distractions around them? How well can they focus if they're packed into a room that's too small? How seriously do they take the content if the company doesn't communicate that it takes it seriously?
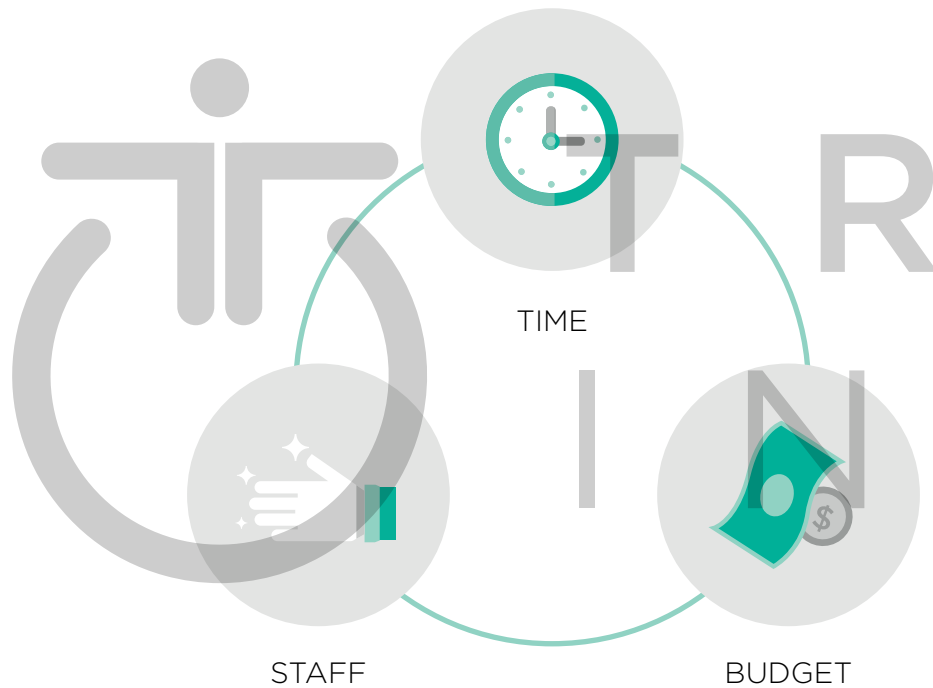
TIME

STAFF

BUDGET

LIMITED RESOURCES

The term "limited resources" can refer to a broad spectrum of resources, including time, staff and budget. Limitations in any one of these areas can prove challenging, but they often coincide with one another. For example, if there aren't enough in-house staff with the time or expertise to create and implement training, then the organization may need to outsource that function. On the other hand, if a limited budget prohibits outsourcing, then the L&D staff will probably be tasked with finding the time to oversee training design and implementation. It's common to lean on a more abundant resource to fill in the pieces for the more limited one, but this approach often results in overexerting available resources, including the training organization's most valuable resource: its people.

L&D CHALLENGES FROM 2015 TO 2019

Although it is valuable to know what learning leaders see as the most frequent challenges to L&D, it's also important to understand how the prevalence of these challenges has changed over time. In this section, we'll discuss which challenges appear to be fading and which appear to be growing or emerging. (Importantly, just because a particular L&D challenge is shrinking or growing in general doesn't mean that it's necessarily doing so at your company or in your industry. These insights are simply to help you benchmark your own organization and understand the broader learning and development market.)

FADING CHALLENGES IN CORPORATE TRAINING

" The challenges of defining evaluation metrics, evaluating training effectiveness and sustaining the impact of training appear to be decreasing in prevalence over time."

The percentage of survey respondents identifying defining evaluation metrics as a challenge (Figure 5) decreased from 2015 to 2016 and from 2016 to 2017. Then, it grew in 2018 and dropped to its lowest point in 2019. This pattern may be due to the fact that over time, this challenge has gained more attention, especially with the increasing use of big data, analytics and dashboards. As the number and quality of analysis tools improves, more companies are focusing on the quality of the information that feeds them. Accordingly, defining metrics is less of a challenge, and as they become more comfortable with this process, L&D functions are able to secure more buy-in from decision-makers. Of course, this challenge is not yet walking off into the sunset, but more companies are able to tackle this issue now than in past years.
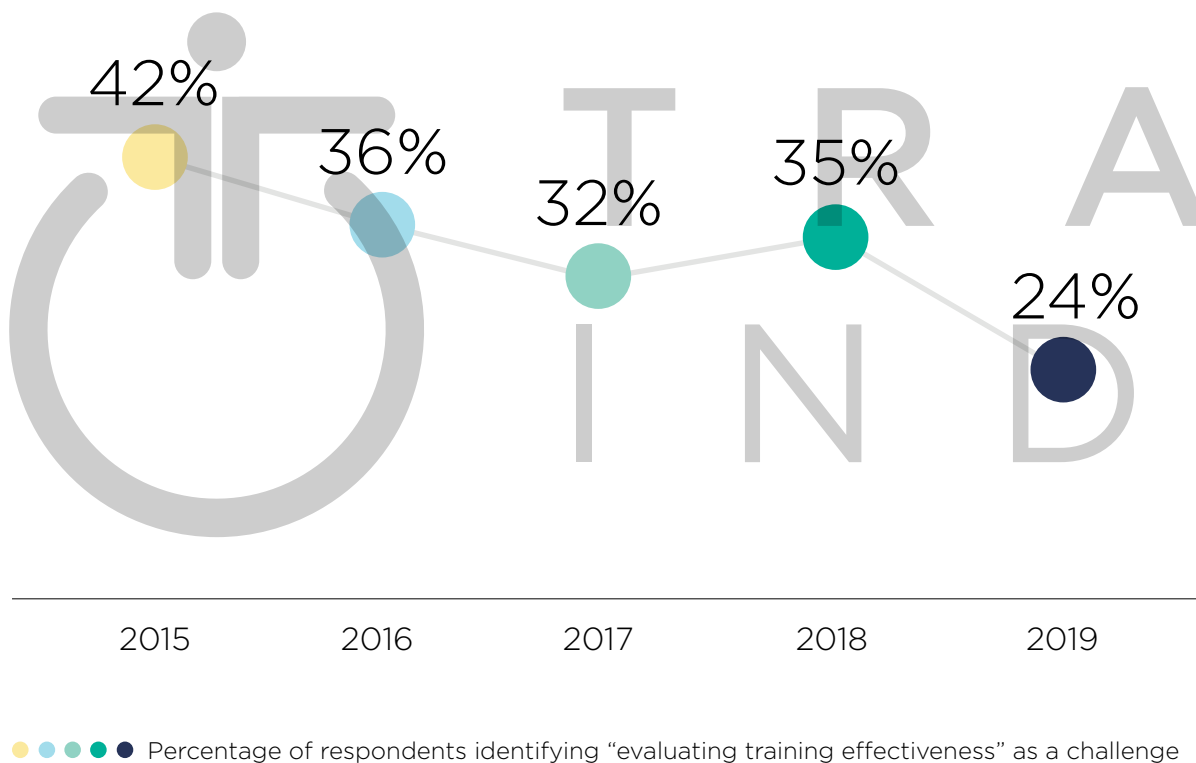
Figure 5.
Organizations Identifying Defining Evaluation Metrics as a Challenge

36% 26% 19% 32% 17%

2015   2016   2017   2018   2019

● ● ● ● ● Percentage of respondents identifying "defining evaluation metrics" as a challenge
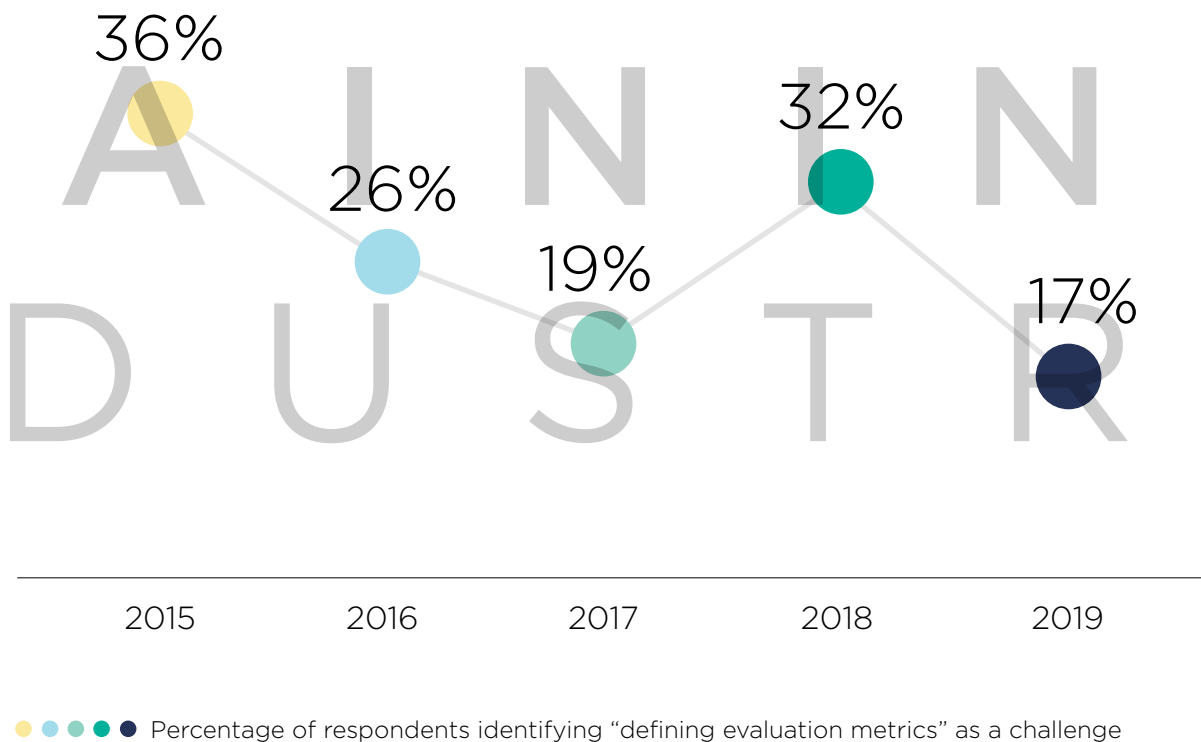
Figure 6.
Organizations Identifying Evaluating Training Effectiveness as a Challenge

42%
36%
32%
35%
24%

2015   2016   2017   2018   2019

Percentage of respondents identifying "evaluating training effectiveness" as a challenge

Related to the challenge of defining metrics is using them. Figure 6 shows that there has been a fairly constant downward trend in number of survey respondents who identify evaluating the effectiveness of training as a challenge. While nearly one-quarter of companies still contend with this challenge, that number is significantly less than it was just a couple of years ago. Again, part of the reason this challenge may be waning is that learning technologies are better able to capture data, and more companies are making use of these capabilities — though, again, they do rely on learning leaders' ability to define the metrics beforehand. Another reason this challenge may be less prominent in 2019 is that L&D professionals are more aware of the need to demonstrate ROI and, as a result, are focusing more attention on evaluating how well a training initiative is performing.

Training sustainment is also a less common challenge than it has been in the past. While the overall decrease shown in Figure 7 has a gentle downward slope to it, "sustainment" has been a more popular term in the vocabulary of the learning and development industry. Fewer learning leaders may be identifying sustainment as a challenge, because they've been talking about it more, working to find solutions that enable learners to engage with content post-training and creating more supplementary content for that purpose.

Figure 7.

Organizations Identifying Sustaining the Impact of Training as a Challenge

- 42% — 2015
- 30% — 2016
- 27% — 2017
- 25% — 2018
- 29% — 2019

●●●●● Percentage of respondents identifying "sustaining the impact of training" as a challenge
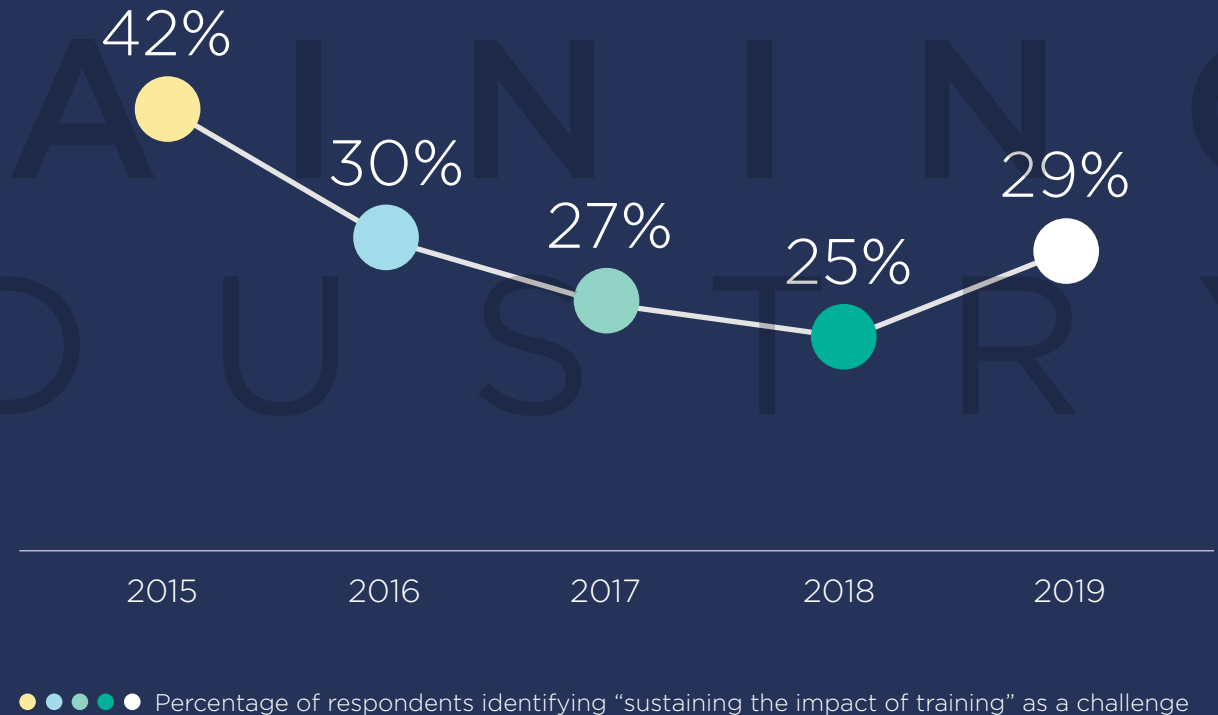
It's important to note that these three challenges are not "solved." They are still issues learning leaders must deal with, as evidenced by the number of companies that continue to experience them. Knowing what to evaluate — and then evaluating it — are going to continue to be important as decision-makers look for proof of ROI. And, of course, to create that ROI, it will always be important to support learning beyond a training event so that employees retain and apply the skills they learned there.

EMERGING CHALLENGES IN CORPORATE TRAINING

The workplace is changing and with it, the needs of employees and the demand for effective training. These changes are reflected in the emerging challenges learning leaders are facing across industries. For example, Figure 8 shows that the number of L&D professionals who identify the alignment of training with company goals as challenging has largely been on the rise. Despite a dip in 2018, this data shows a continuous struggle to ensure that training is helping the organization reach its goals and face the future head-on.

On the other hand, the fact that this challenge has become more common could be good news. Training can be effectively designed, delivered and measured but still not perfectly aligned to the business. As a result, it's typically a challenge learning leaders address when the other challenges — the lower-hanging fruit — are addressed. The fact that more survey respondents are citing it as a challenge, then, is arguably a sign that they are addressing the other challenges more effectively.

Figure 8.
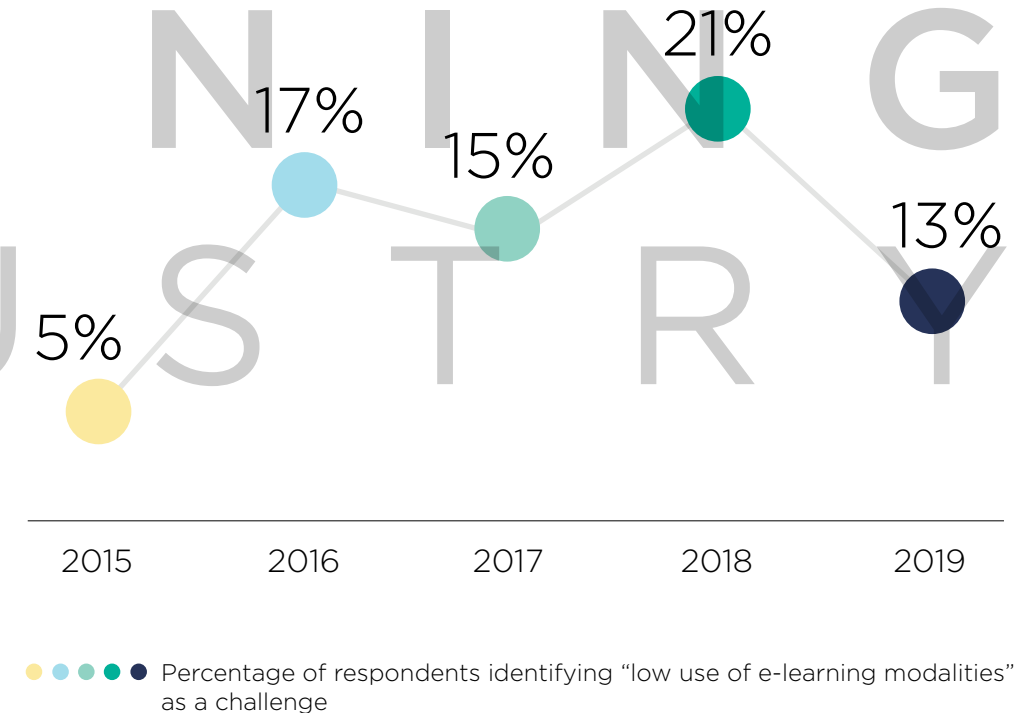## Organizations Identifying Aligning Training With Company Goals as a Challenge

4%	20%	26%	9%	16%
2015	2016	2017	2018	2019

● ● ● ● ● Percentage of respondents identifying "aligning training with company goals" as a challenge
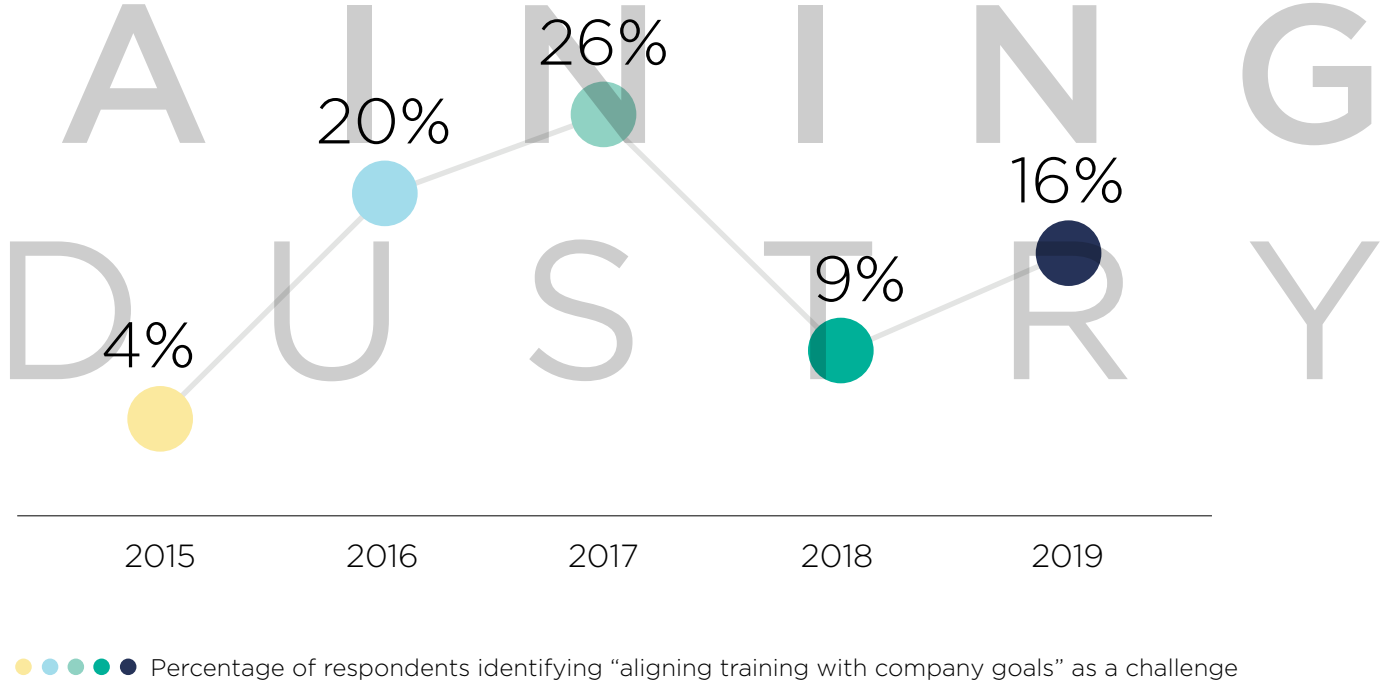
We don't need to explain that in the past couple of decades, technology has exploded and brought new and exciting learning tools to the corporate world. However, growth is typically accompanied by growing pains, and Figure 9 illustrates one: the low use of e-learning by employees. One possible explanation for the rise in this challenge is the maturity of such training tools and the ways training programs implement them. For instance, if a company invests in a new platform to deliver e-learning and heavily promotes it among learners, the learners will have high expectations for its performance. If the platform has a poor user experience or if the technology fails during rollout, the negative repercussions on learner engagement could be severe.

Additionally, training content should always leverage the strengths of the modality through which it's delivered. An e-learning platform can have all the bells and whistles boasted by the best, but if the content is dry or its design poor, learners won't care how interactive the platform is. They'll leave before you can say "microlearning!"
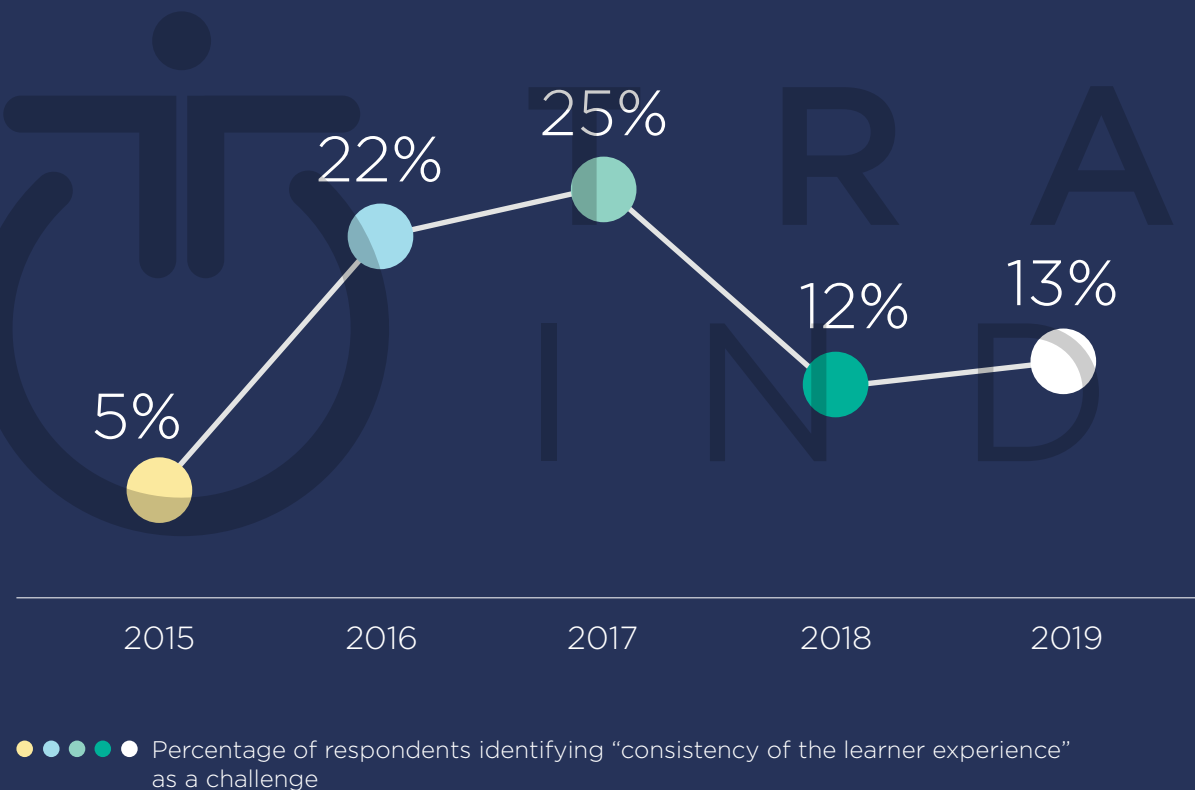
Figure 9.

Organizations Identifying Low Use of E-Learning Modalities as a Challenge

17%

15%

21%

13%

5%

2015   2016   2017   2018   2019

● ● ● ● ● Percentage of respondents identifying "low use of e-learning modalities" as a challenge

Figure 10.
Organizations Identifying the Consistency of the Learner Experience as a Challenge

Percentage of respondents identifying "consistency of the learner experience" as a challenge

Lastly, the number of L&D leaders identifying consistency as a challenge has grown (Figure 10), which is intuitive: Delivering a consistent learning experience is difficult by nature. After all, the reason organizations use different modalities to deliver information is to ensure that the method matches the content and the learner's needs and preferences. Training leaders on how to give feedback? In-person training with live practice and feedback might be best, but what about learners who work from home, who participate via web conferencing? Is their experience comparable? Can you deliver IT training differently to learners who prefer to jump right in and practice the new skills versus learners who want to see them demonstrated first? Is this IT training ill-suited to mobile delivery, or does it work well regardless of screen size? Effective training makes these distinctions — but it's difficult to do well.

In many ways, these results tell a story about the rising tide of technology and the ways it can create problems that manifest over time in L&D functions. The influx of new learning technologies into the corporate training market has created an abundance of opportunities to improve learning. However, it has also created new challenges and exacerbated existing ones. Additionally, it's notable that two of the three fading challenges (evaluating effectiveness and sustaining impact) are still two of the most commonly cited challenges overall (Figure 3). It seems that addressing challenges is a slow game of whack-a-mole, where common challenges slowly fade over time and are replaced by new ones. The good news is that understanding these challenges and how they've changed over time is the first step in tackling them.

> "New learning technologies have created opportunities to improve learning, but they have also created new challenges and exacerbated existing ones."

FADING CHALLENGES	EMERGING CHALLENGES
DEFINING EVALUATION METRICS	ALIGNING TRAINING WITH COMPANY GOALS
EVALUATING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS	LOW USE OF E-LEARNING MODALITIES
SUSTAINING THE IMPACT OF TRAINING	CONSISTENCY OF THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Few, if any, learning leaders can develop, deliver and manage training without obstacles. L&D functions are always grappling with certain training challenges, which we've covered in this report, but may lack context for what's normal. Hopefully, this report has helped you understand where your department falls in the realm of what's typical for other organizations. You now have a better view of the big picture of the ebbs and flows of these challenges over the last several years and insight into what's likely on the horizon. All that's left now is to start tackling the challenges and planning for the future. With that goal in mind, here are some recommendations on how to address the top three challenges learning leaders have told us they face: being consistent, resourceful and accountable.

ENSURING TRAINING CONSISTENCY ACROSS THE ENTERPRISE

Ensuring training consistency is the most common challenge learning leaders face, with almost 40% identifying it as a challenge in our surveys. Whether it's making sure that training quality is the same across modality, geography, culture and function, overcoming this challenge is critical to effective enterprise learning and development. Here are some strategies that can help:

1 MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL TRAINERS

Ensuring that all trainers meet the same standards is one of the best ways to keep training quality consistent across the business. Do so by certifying your trainers, evaluating all trainers rigorously and using the same rubric, and creating detailed and thorough instructor manuals for all courses. Similarly, ensure that trainers are adept at both in-person delivery as well as the techniques and software tools for running high-quality virtual classrooms.

2 USE E-LEARNING

Using e-learning for enterprise-wide programs, such as compliance-based courses, can minimize the risk of inconsistency. Whenever it is crucial to present content in a standard way, e-learning can ensure that you deliver the same message in the same way to every single learner who needs to receive it. This rule can apply whether the content is about new regulations or a change in company strategy or vision.

3 SET A "LEAST-COMMON-DENOMINATOR" BASELINE

When legal restrictions and regulatory requirements differ across cultures or regions, try to find the commonalities among those regions, and create training content starting with that baseline. While it may take more time up front, it is easier to deliver training that takes into account such commonalities than it is to roll out a program that generates a litany of caveats and requires a patchworked explanation of where and to whom it applies. A confused program will result in confused learners.

4. PERSONALIZE TRAINING DURING PRACTICE, NOT DELIVERY

Customizing training based on job function is a great way to improve outcomes, but it can also create inconsistencies. Deliver consistent information across functions, and then personalize practice and application opportunities. This approach helps ensure that learners connect the relevancy of the information presented in training to their day-to-day work.

5. DON'T VARY EXECUTIVE INVOLVEMENT

It's not uncommon for leaders to "check in" to some training events. For example, onboarding programs often include a visit from the company's CEO — but only for employees who work (or at least onboard) at headquarters. This inconsistency results in a different learning experience for employees who work in different locations. When the training content is crucial for employees to learn, a well-intentioned interruption may undermine learning — unless it's not an interruption at all, and the leader's involvement is part of the strategy to emphasize learning outcomes. Executive involvement should be motivating, not distracting, and be so in equal measure for all learners.

DEALING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

From time and staff to budget, many learning leaders must deal with limited resources. When your time or training team are limited, outsourcing can be an excellent alternative to cut costs without cutting training quality, and there are several different options you can choose based on your needs, from outsourcing the entire training function to outsourcing one or two training tasks. Further, there are companies that offer solutions for nearly everything an L&D function could need. When your budget is limited, there are several strategies you can use either to manage without the funds you'd like or to obtain greater funding:

1 PLAN AHEAD

It's easy to become caught up in urgent needs and the day-to-day work of the learning leader, but looking ahead to your future needs will help you know what budget to ask for and use the budget you receive more efficiently. This process typically starts with a deep understanding of current costs in order to know where efficiency gains are feasible and where there are "must-haves."

2 CONSIDER YOUR EXISTING TOOLS

Many of us leverage software and other tools to serve a specific purpose or solve a particular implementation need. Take an inventory of all of the tools and content you've already purchased or created. Can you repurpose any of them? Are there any you aren't using to their fullest extent? Wring every drop of value you can out of what you already have. This process may mean that you have to engage with training to learn what is even possible with the tools at your disposal.

3 CONSIDER FREE TOOLS

There are a variety of free tools and resources available on the internet, from training providers and elsewhere. What can you find that will help you accomplish your goals? While some of these solutions may not be the best, or offer all the features you need, they can help you reach a place where it's easier to make a business case for increasing the budget in the future to cover a paid tool or resource.

4 BE STRATEGIC

Most importantly, focus the resources you do have on the programs with the biggest impact on the business' strategic goals. Then, you'll not only "get the biggest bang for your buck," but you'll also be able to prove your worth to executives — and receive more funding in future budgets.

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING

Speaking of proving your worth, that last tip will only help if you can evaluate the effectiveness of your training programs — which, as we've discussed, is a challenge unto itself. Here are some strategies to support more effective measurement and analysis in your organization:

1 START BEFORE YOU'VE BEGUN

Evaluation starts before a training program has even begun. By identifying your intended learning outcomes during the program development process, you'll be able to identify what to measure, as well as how to measure it. It will mean the difference between an evaluation strategy of, "What is possible and available to us?" and a strategy of, "Is there anything we can do at this point?".

2 IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE DATA SOURCES

If you aren't able to identify training-specific metrics, what business metrics can you use as a proxy? For instance, while you may not be able to directly tie training to a business' accomplishing a strategic goal, you can still point to that achievement and the aligned training program(s) as an indicator of success. Bringing in these other sources of information can also support the training metrics you do have to make a stronger and more comprehensive case for the impact of learning.

3. USE CONTROL GROUPS

When it's feasible (and ethical), use a control group. For instance, compare new sales from a sales team that completed training on prospecting skills with new sales from a team that did not. If the trained sales team has significantly better new sales, you can reasonably guess that the training was effective. These opportunities may present themselves naturally when you roll out a training program in stages across the enterprise. In that case, it's a simple matter of recognizing the opportunity to make this kind of comparison. You may also be able to compare a pilot session (or beta) to a comparison group that roughly matches the learners who participated in the pilot. However, you approach the comparison process, the important point is to use the mechanics of training implementation to your advantage.
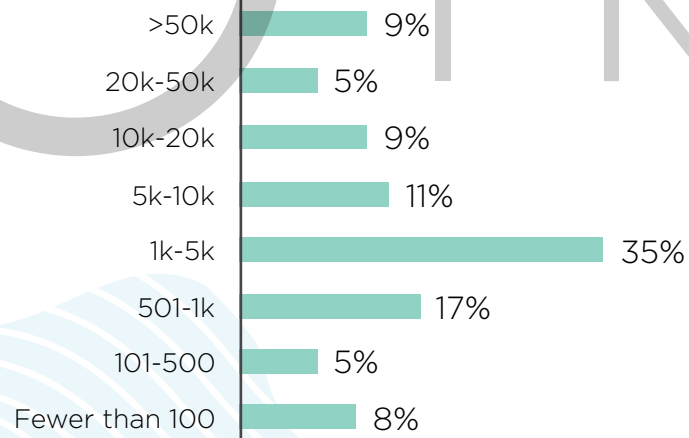
CONCLUSION

Learning leaders face many types of problems, often at the same time. Now, by understanding how common your challenges are, where they come from and how they've changed over the past few years, you'll be able to start anticipating the challenges to come and addressing them proactively and successfully. Hopefully, we'll see some of these common challenges drop off as we enter the next decade.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

All research findings described within this report are based on Training Industry, Inc. research data collected from 2015 to 2019. The following are general demographics of the 3,656 participants whose data comprise the insights contained in this research.
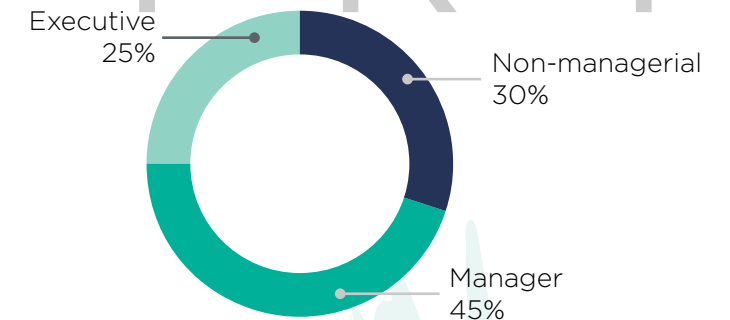
Company Size

- >50k — 9%
- 20k-50k — 5%
- 10k-20k — 9%
- 5k-10k — 11%
- 1k-5k — 35%
- 501-1k — 17%
- 101-500 — 5%
- Fewer than 100 — 8%

Top 7 Industries

(representing over 75% of respondents)

1 | Technology
2 | Banking and Finance
3 | Construction
4 | Business Services
5 | Government
6 | Health Care
7 | Manufacturing

Department

- Executive 25%
- Non-managerial 30%
- Manager 45%

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New insights create new ways for L&D to do business. Training Industry, Inc. provides data-driven analysis and best practices for the corporate training professional by capturing the perspectives of learning professionals, learners and training companies across a diverse array of industries. Our informational resources are shared with hundreds of thousands of monthly website visitors and email subscribers.

The Training Industry, Inc. research team of experienced analysts relies on rigorous survey practices, including targeted sampling and advanced analytics. These practices are based on validated principles of measurement to answer both qualitative and quantitative questions across a variety of research designs, including market research, buyer personas, learner impact analysis, competency models and organizational assessment tools. Our expertise and audience reach allow us to provide learning professionals with in-depth market intelligence and thought leadership insights to reveal where the corporate training market is now and where it is headed in the future.

Training Industry's best-in-class thought leadership insights rely on thousands of survey responses from L&D professionals, training decision-makers and learners about how training works at their companies. Our market segment intelligence is derived from over 15 years of corporate training marketplace analysis and sizing. We compile these data from over 500 training and development vendor company submissions to our annual Top 20 awards.

Our research harnesses the collective wisdom of learning professionals and their unique perspectives on the business of training to inform our continuing professional development programs, including events, classes, certificates and the Certified Professional in Training Management (CPTM™) certification program. We circulate these insights throughout the training market using content marketing, including webinars, infographics, email marketing, and our award-winning magazine and website.

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