

You're Losing Your Audience

How to Leap the Hurdle of Learner Engagement

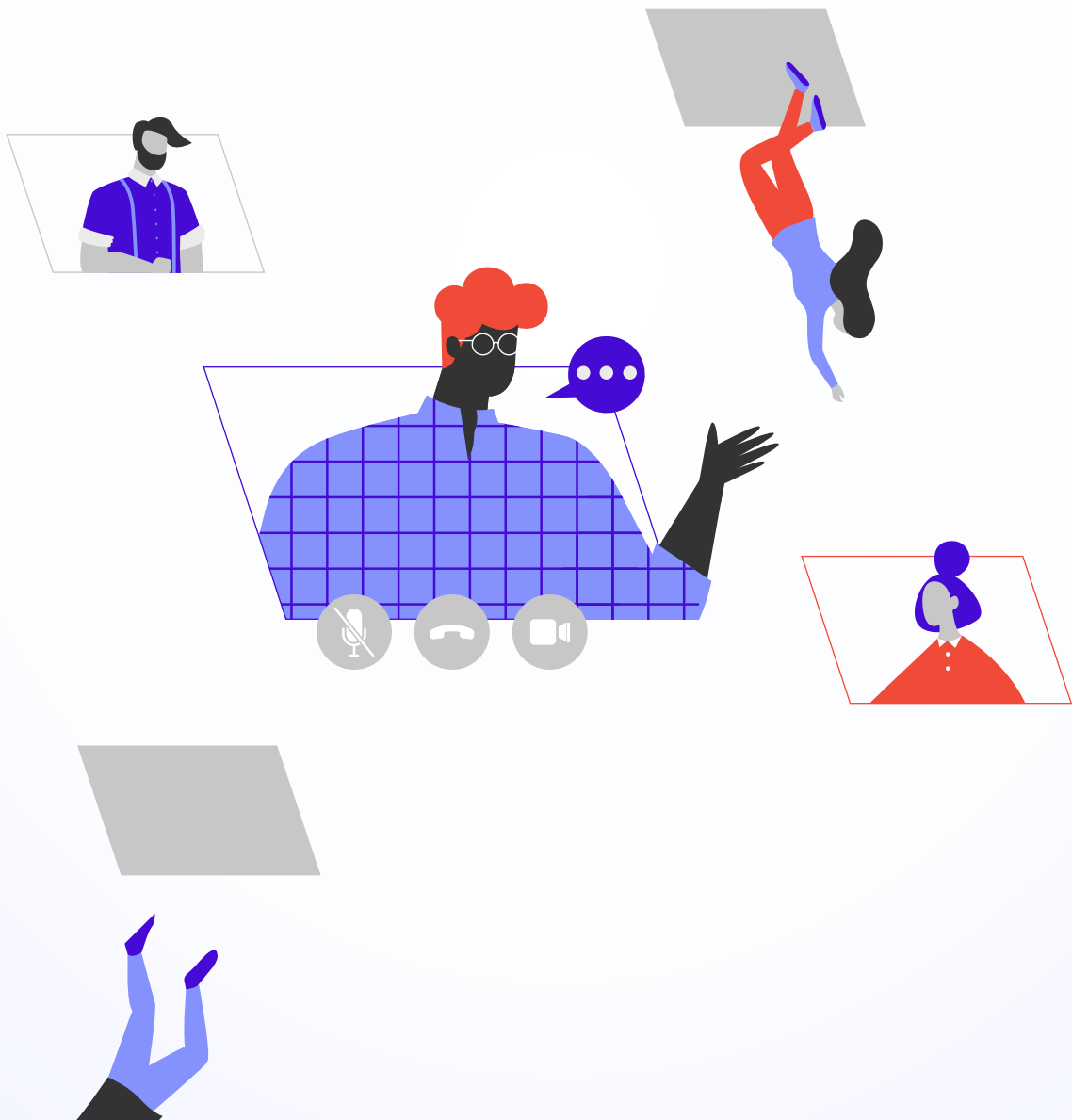


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2-3
Chapter 1: How to Approach the Engagement Hurdle in Software Training	4
Chapter 2: Root Causes for Training Resistance and Demotivation	5-7
Chapter 3: Best Practices to Boost Motivation in Software Training	7-11
Summary	12

The Online Training World is Experiencing its Own Digital Transformation

Software training has changed dramatically over the past few years, with many organizations shifting in-person training to virtual or cloud-based solutions. This has, of course, been accelerated as a result of the pandemic and the new work-from-home status quo.

However, it's no longer a matter of pivoting to online or digital training to 'ride out the storm' of COVID-19; moving online is just step one. It's about recognizing that finding and successfully

onboarding the right digital solutions will become your competitive edge, and training is no exception to that rule.

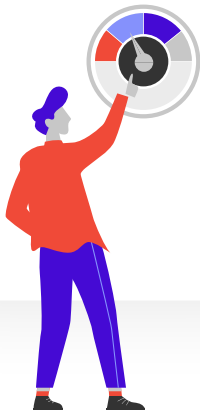
According to Malcolm Cohron, BDO's National Digital Transformation Services Leader, "organizations that embrace digital solutions have greater resiliency in the face of adversity—and a leg up on the competition that will enable them to recover faster and pivot from playing defense to chasing growth".¹

The whole training industry is chasing this shift. In fact, according to research by LinkedIn Learning, 59% of talent developers are spending more of their budget on online learning than they were 3 years ago, and 39% are spending less on in-person instructor-led training.²

As technology leaders continue to perfect their digital offerings, the benefits of virtual training can't be denied. But as we delight in the advantages of a digital solution, and add flexibility, ease of use, security, automation and AI to the mix, one key challenge is becoming clear. Trainees are not engaged.

71%

of companies who deliver online learning find engagement to be the most challenging part of delivering training³



52%

of those who enroll in a course will never look at the courseware⁴

79%

of adult learners indicated staying motivated was a problem for them when completing coursework online⁵



¹ <https://www.bdo.com/insights/business-financial-advisory/strategy-technology-transformation/covid-19-is-accelerating-the-rise-of-the-digital-e>

² <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/amp/learning-solutions/images/workplace-learning-report-2019/pdf/workplace-learning-report-2019.pdf>

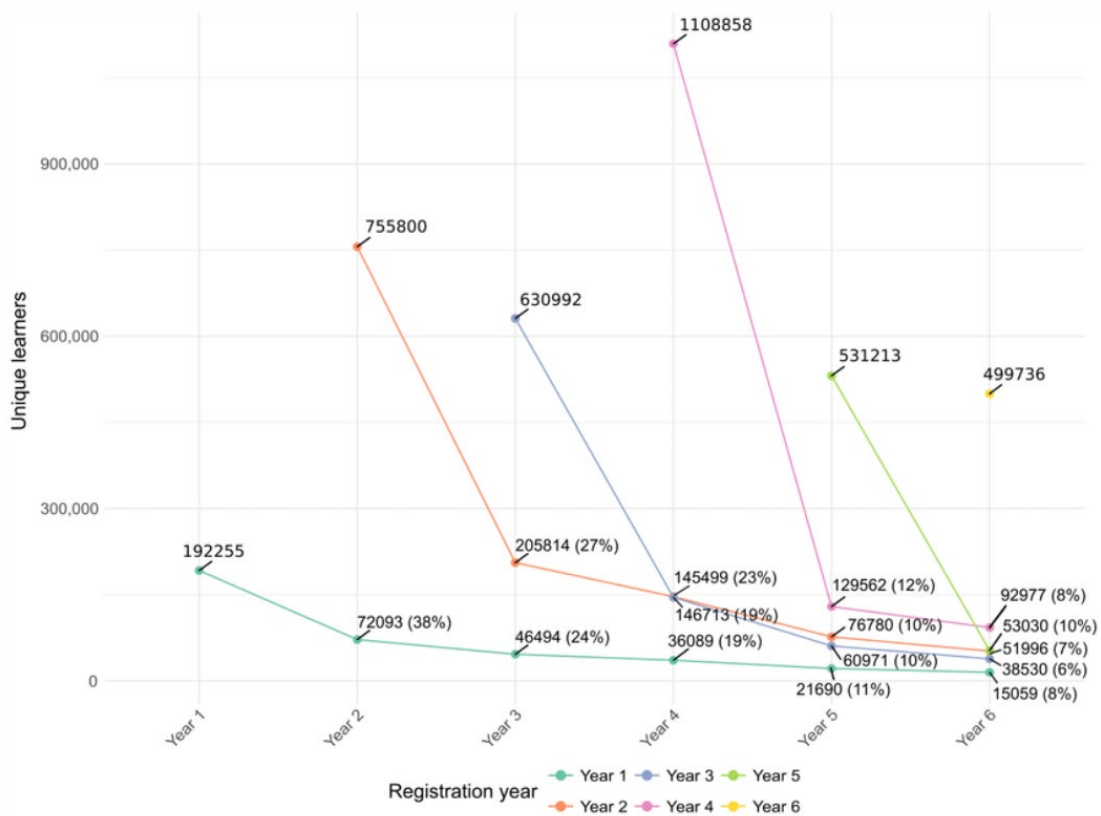
³ <https://www.learnupon.com/blog/elearning-engagement/>

⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330316898_The_MOOC_pivot

⁵ <https://educationdata.org/online-education-statistics>

When looking at Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), the dropout rate averages at

96%
over 5 years



[ResearchGate](#)

In response to this challenge, this e-book will look at:

- Why the engagement hurdle is so hard to beat in software training
- Why trainees feel a lack of motivation when faced with training opportunities
- How distance learning has added to the motivation hurdle
- Best-practices for keeping employees and customers motivated and engaged with online training

1

How to Approach the Engagement Hurdle in Software Training

It's no secret that engagement is a top challenge when it comes to customer and employee training. In fact, in the latest LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report, more than half of all L&D stakeholders indicated that "increasing learner engagement" is a top challenge for their teams.

However, despite stakeholders being aware that learners are not engaged, only 15% of marketing efforts are spent on boosting these learning engagement levels.

Why the gap between the awareness of the issue, and the steps taken to resolve it?

Partly, it may be that talent development leaders have a lot to juggle. In the report, the top focus areas that Learning and Development stakeholders are working on, were listed as:

- Identifying and assessing skills gaps
- Increasing engagement with learning
- Providing consistent learning to global employees
- Developing career frameworks
- Training for soft skills
- Closing organizational skills gaps
- Understanding the impact of technology and automation on skills development

It's important to recognize that these seven focus areas were only separated by 12 percentage points throughout. They are all seen as necessities for today's L&D leaders. As a result, organizations would benefit from thinking broadly when it comes to onboarding new digital training solutions. If stakeholders want to boost learner engagement, and they can approach the c-suite with intelligent software tools that check multiple boxes, they can prove ROI, and are more likely to get the budget they need.

It's also interesting to note that amongst the top focus areas, budget is nowhere to be seen. This is no longer a large constraint for today's businesses. While in 2017, it was the top hurdle for L&D professionals in achieving their goals, with 49% of the vote⁶, today only 27% of leaders consider budget to be holding them back.

If it's not a case of budget, what can training professionals do to help their audience feel motivated to learn?



KEY HIGHLIGHT

Solutions that approach the engagement hurdle at the same time as others on the operational agenda will be more likely to get management buy-in, and organizational attention.

⁶ <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report-2018>

2

Root Causes for Training Resistance and Demotivation

Let's take a deep dive into some of the main reasons why people feel disengaged with training initiatives, whether these come from their own organization, or externally from software providers or other customer education experiences.

The fear of getting it wrong

In a study of 2,000 workers, LinkedIn found that 34% of respondents wanted to impress their boss through learning, and 23% were worried about failing when it came to training opportunities.⁷ If training is not effective (as seen above, 75% of people don't in fact find it to be impactful in their goals) then trainees are setting themselves up for failure. Successful training relies on combating this fear of failure head on, and making trainees feel confident that they will be getting results.

- **Training program fails to improve performance**

Only one quarter of respondents to a recent McKinsey survey say that training measurably improved their business' performance, helping them to meet their goals.⁸ The results are in, and today's training efforts are largely ineffective.

Mike Peterson has a PhD in instructional technology and learning science, and believes that:



“

*The primary reason that employees resist training is that most of the training they experience **doesn't actually help them improve their job performance**, and therefore it doesn't motivate them to participate in training.⁹*

This is true whether it's internal training on their core jobs, or external from SaaS companies as a part of customer education and upskilling programs which also help employees to get better at their day jobs. Many existing training programs are focused on checklists and quizzes, and don't offer any ability to physically learn on new technologies and see if that information has been retained.

⁸ [Building organizational capabilities: McKinsey Global Survey results, mckinseyquarterly.com, March 2010](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-and-digital/insights/building-organizational-capabilities-mckinsey-global-survey-results-mckinseyquarterly-com-march-2010)

⁹ <https://www.letterpressconsulting.com/why-employees-resist-training.html>

- **“Fad” training methods with no real learning**

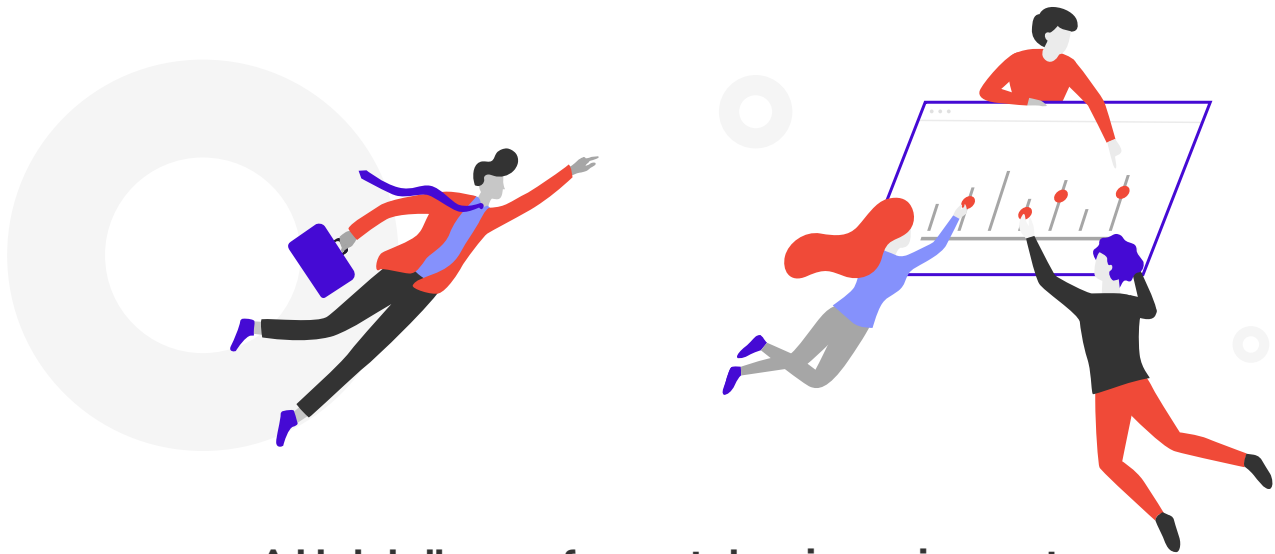
On top of this, **Peterson** explains that many designers and content creators build training with what he calls “superficial motivators” such as avatars, games, videos, and the latest fad technologies. These don’t actually teach users how to succeed at their jobs, and while they may be more high-tech than the check-list approach, they’re not any more impactful.

Rather than support effective learning and engagement, Peterson continues that these efforts “can actually demotivate employees who anticipate learning how to improve important skills related to their job, [and] discover that the training is actually another bait and switch **experience in which they are entertained but not taught.**”

- **A negative attitude towards training**

The above explanation exacerbates another problem, namely the negative attitude that many users have around training in the first place. These thoughts usually come back to the same few underlying beliefs, whether training won’t help them in their career or in their use of this product, or that training will be a waste of their time. A ripple effect of this is that trainees pay less attention the next time they are in front of training materials, making it even less likely that they will learn or retain knowledge.

As Merrill et al reiterates, training has to be non-theoretical and skills-based to help users shake that negative attitude and show them that they are going to learn something impactful. “If an experience or environment does not include the instructional strategies required for the acquisition of the desired knowledge or skill, then effective, efficient, and appealing learning of the desired outcome will not occur.”¹⁰



- **Added challenges of a remote learning environment**

Providing these kinds of hands-on, instructional learning environments is almost impossible face to face, which is one of the reasons why so many software providers are onboarding digital solutions for training. After all, it was tough enough to get everyone in the same place at the same time, with the right infrastructure set-up even pre-COVID-19. Not to mention the challenges of getting the right expert to hold the training session, and how they’re going to retain visibility over dozens of workstations at the same time.

Cloud-based environments met this challenge head-on, allowing all users to remotely log-in to a predefined template of a customer network, and gain hands-on experience on any SaaS solution. At the same time, this approach also gives an instructor the ability to teach from one centralized location, so that businesses can get the right talent for the task at hand.

¹¹ <https://news.stanford.edu/2018/10/25/decade-data-reveals-heavy-multitaskers-reduced-memory-psychologist-says/>

However, with these advancements come even more challenges for learner engagement.

- **Content that isn't fit for the medium**

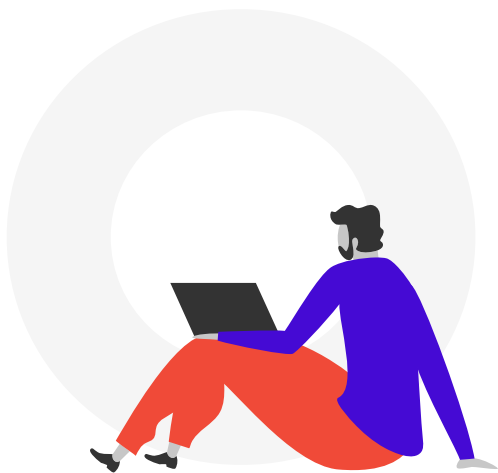
Traditionally, users would have an instructor or a 'showman' at the front of a class, teaching from a static presentation or a whiteboard, perhaps enhancing this with video or audio content. To move training online, many organizations simply attempt a 'lift and shift' of this approach to a virtual classroom, while much of the content often needs to be repurposed for a successful learning experience online.

- **Lack of concentration**

Online, participants pay less attention. With so much distraction all around them, people are more likely to attempt to multitask while training remotely. Researchers at Stanford found that multitaskers have reduced memory capacity compared to those who work on one task at a time,¹¹ making the training experience far from effective.

- **Zoom Fatigue**

Research has shown that Zoom fatigue is far more than a buzzword. The Harvard Business Review found that online, users focus on the faces and backgrounds of their fellow trainees, which could include furniture, plants, and even the books on their shelves. "The brain has to process all of these visual environmental cues at the same time" creating mental fatigue very quickly.¹²



Other challenges of remote training include:

- **Isolation**

Users feeling like they're 'going it alone' and not having the support or camaraderie of a class

- **Accountability**

No-one to check up on them, or the sensation that no-one will know or care if they skip the training

- **Availability**

Especially in remote environments, low latency and reliability can be a real problem, impacting the training experience for learners

- **Technical skills**

Many trainees do not work in a technical environment, and may struggle when faced with new technology or training software

¹² <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue>

3

Best Practices to Boost Motivation in Software Training

It's clear that today's training leaders have a lot to manage. They need to create impactful learning experiences that combat virtual challenges, at the same time as adapting user preconceptions around training.

The following best practices can help training program managers get their users invested in training and development, allowing them to reap the benefits of hands-on, engaging training for their organization.

#1 | Move the focus to experiential learning

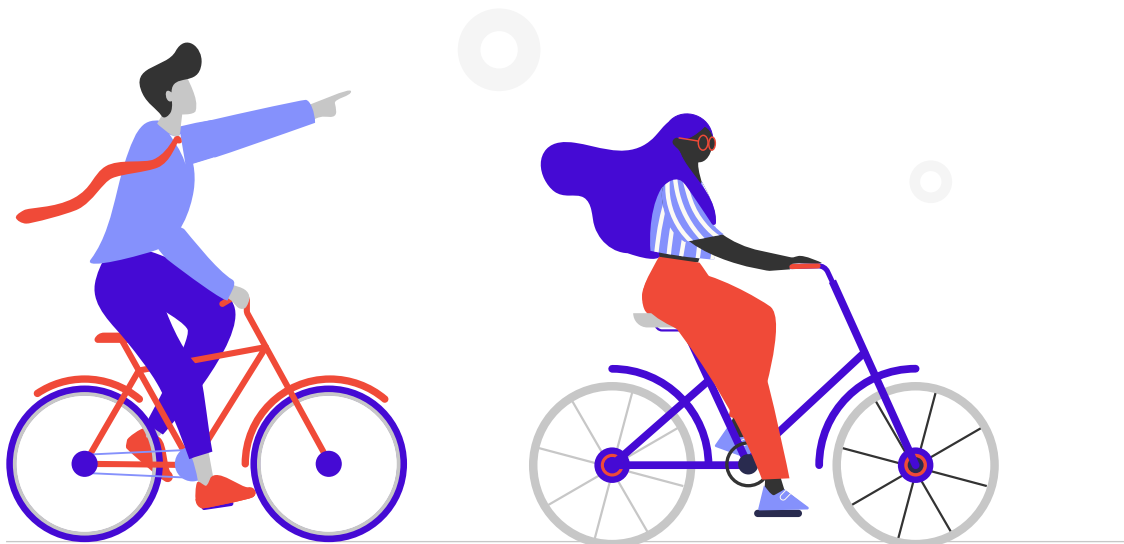
Technology can help to eliminate the fear of failure, moving the focus from checklists and quizzes, to experiential learning that is far more impactful, and promotes the kind of "effective, efficient, and appealing learning" that we discussed above.

To make this happen, first, make sure that your technology is set up for zero mistakes, so that you're sidestepping your trainees' negative thoughts around failing. This means creating safe, sandbox environments that literally allow users to play and test to their heart's content, without the worry that they might make errors that could impact the wider network.

Then, enrich and enhance your training solution so that it's more of an experience, and less of a test. An added benefit of this is that it gives you opportunities for social interactions, reducing the impact of isolation and loneliness that can be an inhibitor to user engagement.

Here are a few ideas for embedded content that promotes social interaction:

- Breakout group tasks to encourage collaboration
- Virtual chats and discussions either privately or with the instructor
- Whiteboards for bringing users together on a specific problem



#2 | Track and monitor progress

It's important for trainees to feel that someone is watching, especially if they are motivated by their manager's opinions, which 75% of employees say that they are.¹³ Today's managers want to see their employees onboard SaaS tools that they are achieving mastery in, so whether it's internal training from their own business, or external customer training with software tools, gaining expertise and certification is a leg-up.

Of course, you need to ensure that you have a measurable, hands-on skill to track. According to Forbes,

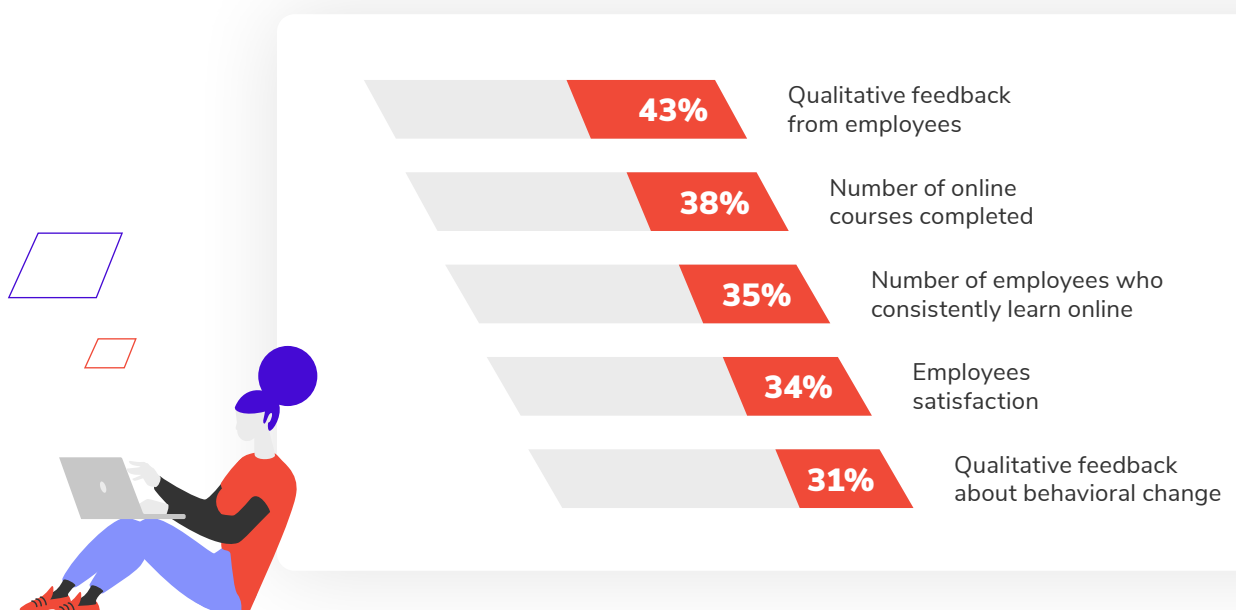


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*At the end of a training course, employees should be able to do something they couldn't do or couldn't do well before the class. If you don't know what skill your employees need that they don't have, **you are wasting your money.***¹⁴

This is equally true for customer education. If you don't know what skill you're trying to teach your users, you're not prepared to start a customer training program.

As seen by the top priorities for today's L&D professionals below,¹⁵ look for metrics that track different variables, from quantitative data that shows how many courses were completed, to qualitative assessments from employees, and information on satisfaction, frustration, and churn.



¹³ <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/amp/learning-solutions/images/workplace-learning-report-2019/pdf/workplace-learning-report-2019.pdf>

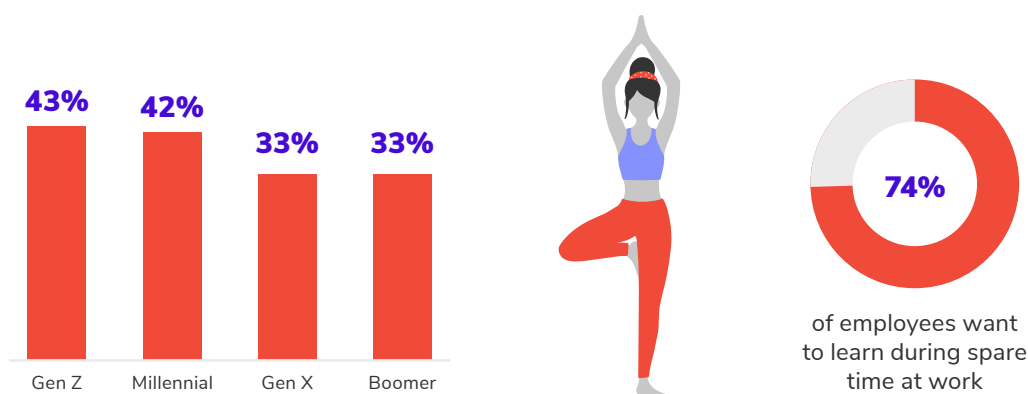
¹⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annlatham/2017/01/10/8-reasons-you-are-wasting-your-time-and-money-on-training/?sh=2027ed87e131>

¹⁵ <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/learning/resources/pdfs/LinkedIn-Learning-2020-Workplace-Learning-Report.pdf>

On the business side, **tracking and measuring of your training program is also a huge benefit for your organization.** With this level of robust analytics in place, you can see how your training is going, and tweak as necessary. Remember that each group and situation is unique, so your analytics and Business Intelligence should be able to drill down to specific classes, software products, locations, and even users, so that you can ascertain why those differences matter.

#3 | Provide hybrid experiences that speak to all users

An important foundational step in building remote training experiences is recognizing what today's learners are looking for. Across the board, for all age groups, there is a split. Some users want instructor-led training, while others want to be self directed. In fact, more than 30% of all age ranges want fully self-directed learning opportunities.



Let's take a closer look at one sector, Gen Z. According to the latest data, 43% of this group want a fully self-directed and independent approach to learning, and yet just 20% of L&D pros say that they will offer this as an option.¹⁶ With 4 out of 5 L&D professionals taking this off the table, **there is a real chance that this group, arguably most in need of training, will disengage completely.**

Of course, training needs to appeal to everyone, which is why hybrid solutions are the real best practice here, allowing you to be dynamic in your own needs. If your solution can do both remote instructor-led training, and effective self-paced learning, you're ready for anything. Some use cases include:

- **A hybrid training model**

For example, you may choose to start with a strong instructor-led kick off, followed by self-paced learning in the user's own time, to practice the skills you've explained.

- **'Just in time' support**

Allowing users to work their way through a training course, and then leverage a tool such as 'over-the-shoulder-view' that allows you to add instructor-led help when friction or frustration occurs.

- **Targeted training for specific groups**

Instructor-led training courses could be created specifically for low-tech groups of trainees, or on request from a customer or vendor. For instance, 72% of Millennials value having instructors around when taking a course.¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/learning/en-us/pdfs/LinkedIn-L&D-Gen-Z-Infographic-Learner-Engagement-Playbook.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/amp/learning-solutions/images/workplace-learning-report-2019/pdf/workplace-learning-report-2019.pdf>

#4

Think about engagement at every stage

According to eLearning industry, “When it comes to Self-paced Virtual Training, some remote learners take time to tune in. By keeping the journey intuitive, precise, and relevant, you will have their attention and higher engagement.”¹⁸

eLearning continues by saying that immersive learning techniques like experiential learning and hands-on environments can be leveraged in your virtual training platform. These will boost engagement, improve completion rates, create sticky learning experiences, and even increase your chances of impacting employee behavior over the long term.

While we saw above how HBR believes that passively watching a video-conferencing based training session can create unnecessary mental fatigue, immersive environments make users feel successful. Not only that, but through measures such as practice and repetition, they can affect real behavioral change. To put it succinctly,



“ *interactivity results in **more effective knowledge transfer*** ”

During the instructor-led portion of online learning, a feature-rich platform should be built for motivating and engaging users, including the ability to hand-raise, chat, embed video and audio, share screens with the wider group, and even offer an over the shoulder view for better feedback and control. However, it's true that some of the engagement can be dictated by the skills and charisma of the instructor.

When it comes to the self-paced element of learning and training, this motivator disappears, so building-in features that breed engagement should be top of the to-do list at all times. Here are a few ideas:

- **Think about design**

What navigational aids do you have in place? All buttons, icons and arrows should be easy to find, designed intuitively, and very visible on the page, especially if you're hoping that users will find their way around the platform.

- **Make it feel like you**

You might want to integrate your brand voice or style into the content, to help employees or customers feel that they are working within a cohesive, holistic environment.

- **Move away from gimmicks**

You may also decide to add extra features and tools for engagement to your virtual training solution. Remember, these need to have a purpose, and not be simply fad technologies. Think about options such as gamification, VR or AR, or scenario-based learning. If relevant, these can have a really positive impact on engagement levels, with studies showing that 83% of those that receive gamified training feel more motivated compared to those who do not.¹⁹

¹⁸ <https://elearningindustry.com/free-ebooks/virtual-training-guide-how-to-future-proof-transformation>

¹⁹ <https://www.talentlms.com/blog/gamification-survey-results/#83%20of%20those%20who%20receive%20gamified%20training%20feel%20motivated>

#5

When it comes to training, keep it simple

In the past decade, organizations have gone from using an average of 10 L&D technologies, to more than 22.²⁰ It's no wonder that online training can feel disjointed, and that users simply can't benefit from all that an organization has to give.

Any designer worth their salt knows that engagement is about the back-end as much as the UX. For back-end technology, one single unified platform is always going to be exponentially easier to use than a patchwork solution created from multiple platforms. We live in the era of Rich APIs and intelligent integrations, so accept nothing less than a single view of all LMS and CMS systems, learning experience platforms, and anything else you need to get up and running.

You also need to ensure that your virtual training plays nicely with as broad a range of technologies as possible, to avoid friction. When you hear accessible, make sure it means:



Location

Your trainees could be anywhere in the world. Ensure that you can access training from anywhere, without an impact on availability and reliability.



Technology

If your users need to download new software or connect new hardware, you've lost them. The best solutions will work from a web browser, no matter the endpoint the user logs in from.



Cloud

Don't get tied down to one vendor. Look for a solution that allows you to leverage public clouds and/or a private cloud option for additional security requirements. If possible, find a hybrid solution that lets you train on all clouds simultaneously.



Ability

As we said before, some users will be tech-savvy, while others will be new to online learning. Your training solution should be out-of-the-box, without the need for a heavy learning curve or additional technical skills.



²⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/671601/growth-of-technology-adoption-in-l-and-d-departments-worldwide/>

Your Audience is Already Onside - They Just Need Your Help

According to KPMG, internal mobility and reskilling need to be second nature in the new digital economy.²¹ If learning and development has been a tough sell with your customers, employees and managers so far, let's change that. 94% of employees say that they see the value in making time to learn, whether that's internally or from their software vendors, and 99% of L&D professionals recognize the danger of the skills gap.²²

They don't need convincing - they need your leadership.

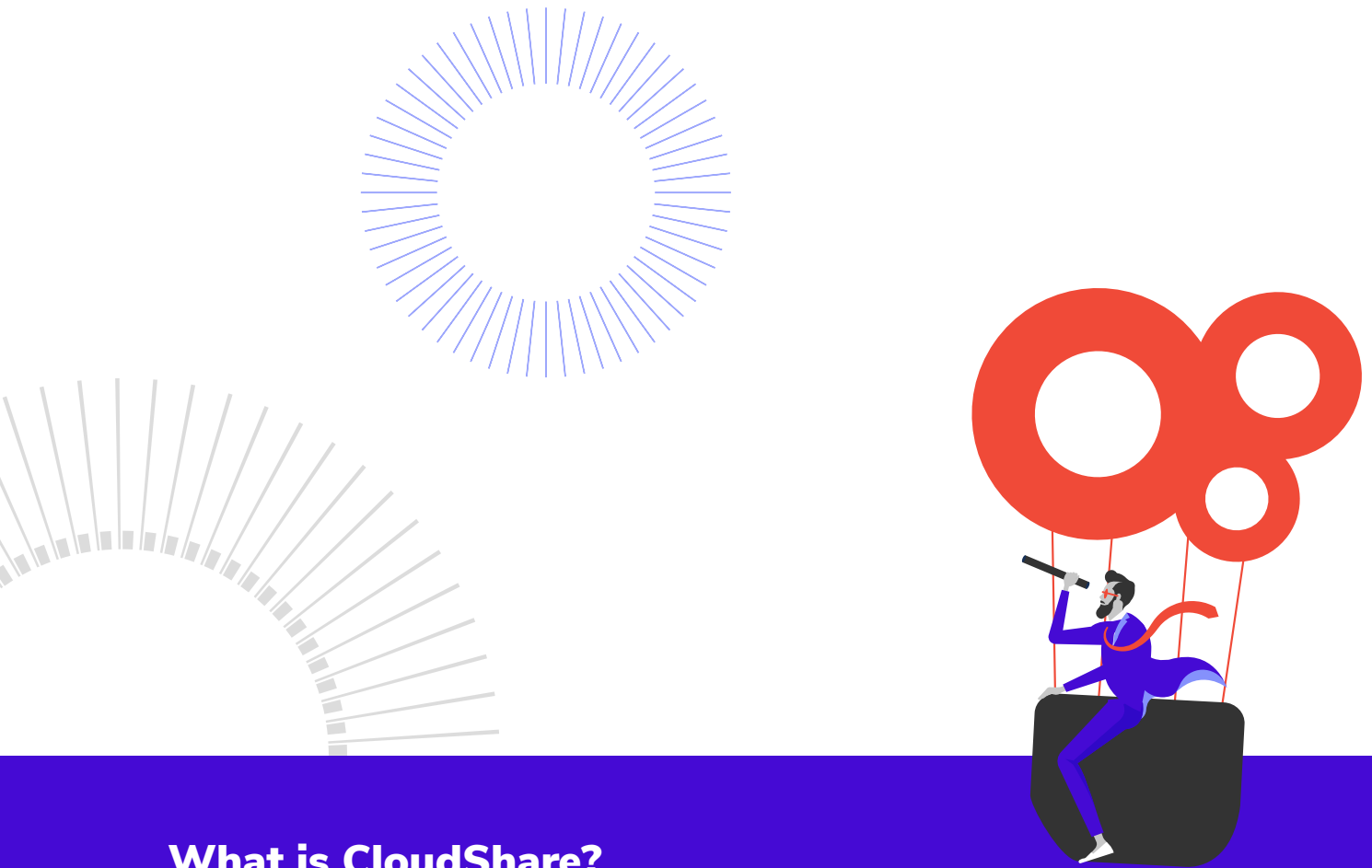
Today's users are looking to you, their L&D teams, to help them with professional development, upskilling and reskilling with new SaaS-based innovation, and in continuing to accelerate digital transformation in all areas of the business. The only thing standing in your way from championing this shift, is learner engagement.

The technology is available to meet this challenge. When implemented with these best practices in mind, it can support you in revolutionizing your online training offering, and make learning environments more accessible, personalized, available, and impactful. If you're not taking advantage, you're being left behind.



²¹ <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2020/04/the-importance-of-workforce-transformation-in-a-covid-19-world-a-kpmg-viewpoint-final.pdf>

²² <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/learning/resources/pdfs/LinkedIn-Learning-2020-Workplace-Learning-Report.pdf>



What is CloudShare?

CloudShare is the most powerful solution for hands-on software experiences; from sales demos and POCs, to customer and employee training, certification, and sandboxing.

Our virtual environments are completely customizable and allow the end-user to experiment with your software in a safe environment that mimics their own, thus enabling the most effective experiences.

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