NovoEd

How the shift to remote work made learning better

Independent research and insights on how to transform L&D for the new reality

MAY 2021

WHAT'S INSIDE

INTRODUCTION

Navigating the paradigm shift in corporate learning

Before the global pandemic hit in early 2020, digital transformation was already underway at most companies. COVID-19 simply accelerated it — by a factor of 40 when it came to increasing remote working and collaboration capabilities.[1]

Corporate learning and development (L&D) was no different. In the center of the fray, L&D leaders had to pivot at lightning speed and transition in-person training to online platforms and deliver it to a workforce that was entirely remote.

No going back

Now more than ever — as skills, jobs, and entire industries are quickly evolving to keep up with digital transformation — learning leaders play a critical and strategic role in shaping their organizations.

Enterprise L&D is expected to not only close skills gaps but also ensure that employees have the tools and resiliency — now and in the future — to adapt to rapid, massive change.

On top of that, remote learning is here to stay. Even as some workers transition back to the workplace, the hybrid workforce — with some employees on-site, some permanently remote, and many working combined schedules — is the new reality. For L&D, there will be no return to "the old days."

Using hindsight to transform tomorrow's learning experiences

One year later, reflecting on their experiences digitizing in-person learning for an entirely remote workforce, many L&D leaders report that online learning can not only work — there is evidence that in many cases it actually works better than in-person.

Interestingly, nearly all (95%) of those who said quality improved when training went online were very or somewhat surprised.

In what ways has virtual training worked better? Where did learners or leaders struggle, and how are leaders applying lessons learned to accelerate training programs to upskill, reskill, and increase organizational resiliency?

Through independent research commissioned by NovoEd, a leader in collaborative digital learning, L&D leaders from 150 organizations with over $1 billion in annual revenue weigh in on their experiences. Read on for the results, key takeaways, and what leaders expect for the remainder of 2021 and beyond.

"If 2020 was the year of disruption, 2021 will be the year when transformation truly kicks in."

— Online Collaborative Learning for the Enterprise: The Complete Guide, NovoEd (2021)

Were you surprised that training quality improved with remote training?

95%

5%
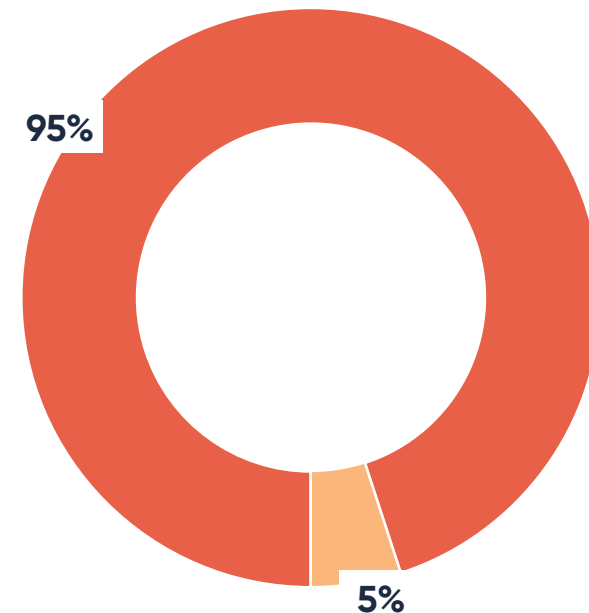
● Very surprised or somewhat surprised

● Not surprised

ONE YEAR LATER:
THE TRANSFORMATION OF CORPORATE LEARNING

As L&D leaders reflect on the past year, how are they feeling about remote learning?

What went better than expected, and what challenges did they encounter?

Which types of training transitioned to an online format most easily?

Reflecting on the move to digital: Results were better than expected

Despite challenges inherent in moving training online at a rapid pace, overall many L&D leaders were surprised by the outcomes and quality.

8 OUT OF 10

L&D leaders agree that virtual training produces better outcomes

Online training increased learner reach

When training went digital, L&D leaders found that, compared to in-person learning, they could improve access and equity by reaching a greater number of learners.

"We now have the opportunity to create a true culture of continuous learning to build a more equitable workplace."

— LinkedIn Learning Workplace Learning Report 2021

Do you think the move from in-person training to digital training opens up learning opportunities to more employees?
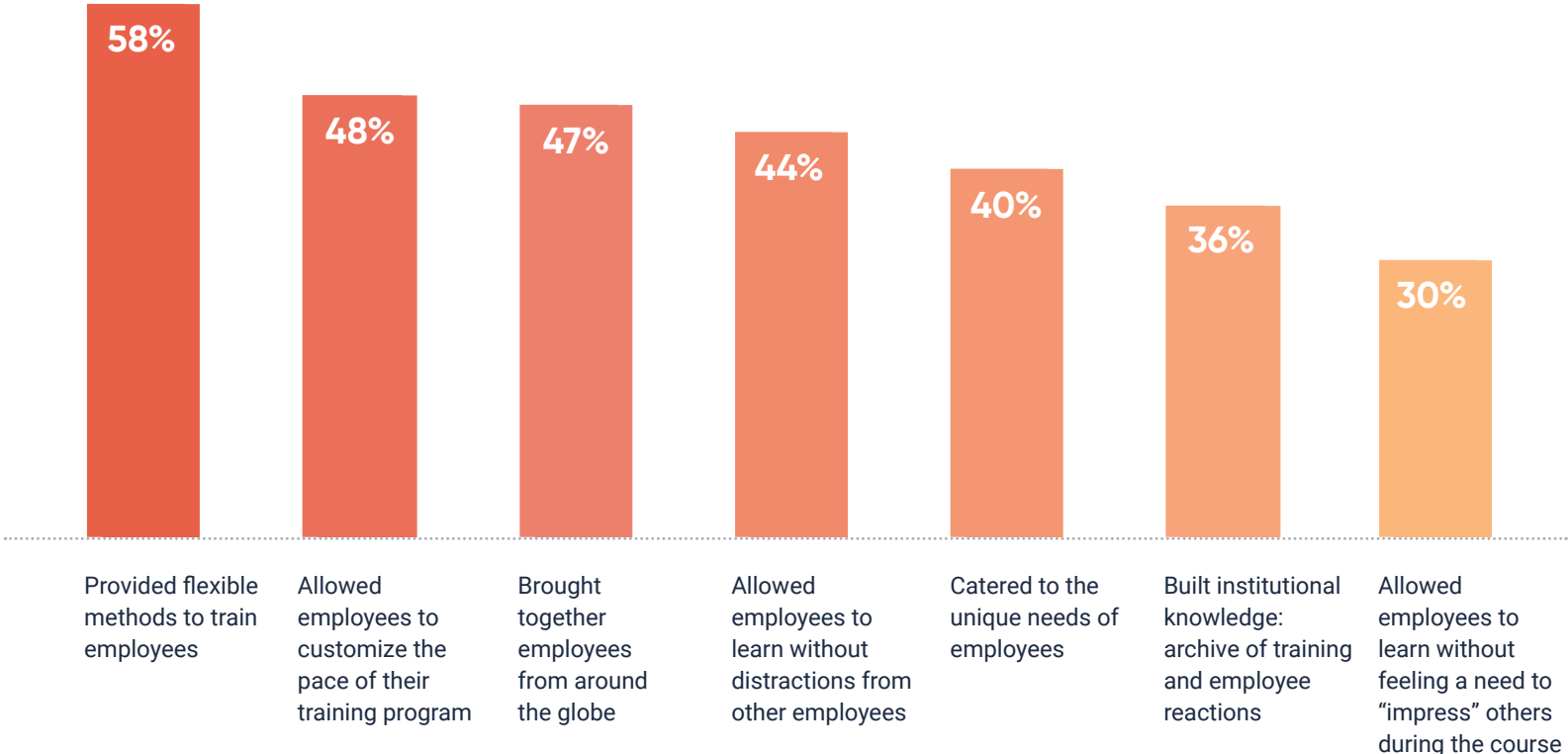
52%
36%
5%
5%
1%
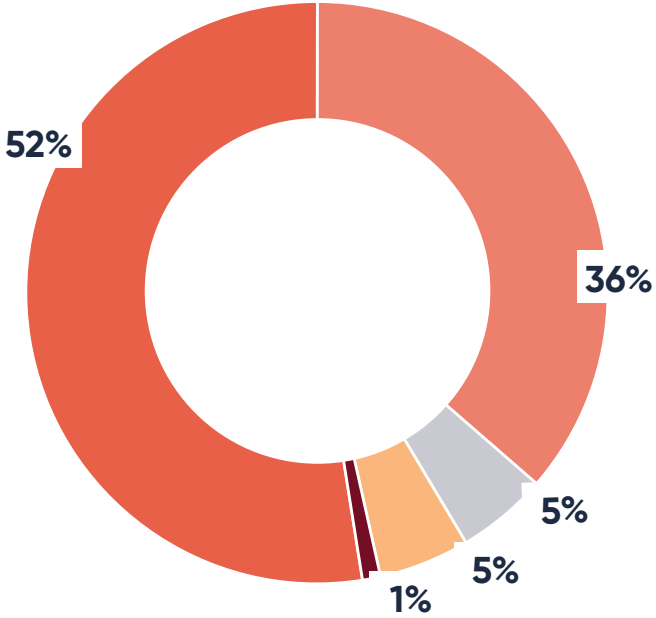
- Definitely
- Probably
- I don't know
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Moving training online increased options and improved connections

Companies found they had more ways to deliver training, and employees could tailor their learning schedule as well as connect with colleagues around the world.

Has moving your training online made any of the following possible? (Select all that apply)

58%	48%	47%	44%	40%	36%	30%
Provided flexible methods to train employees	Allowed employees to customize the pace of their training program	Brought together employees from around the globe	Allowed employees to learn without distractions from other employees	Catered to the unique needs of employees	Built institutional knowledge: archive of training and employee reactions	Allowed employees to learn without feeling a need to "impress" others during the course

Flexibility and reinforcement of learning among the biggest benefits of online training

Retention is better when employees can engage in self-paced learning over time and go back to review the content at their convenience.

What are the benefits of virtual training compared to in-person training? (Select all that apply)

|					
70%	**57%**	**51%**	**48%**	**48%**	**42%**
Learn at their own pace	Can go back to review	More flexibility for employees	Can reinforce learning over longer periods of time	Companies can offer a wide variety of training	Lower costs
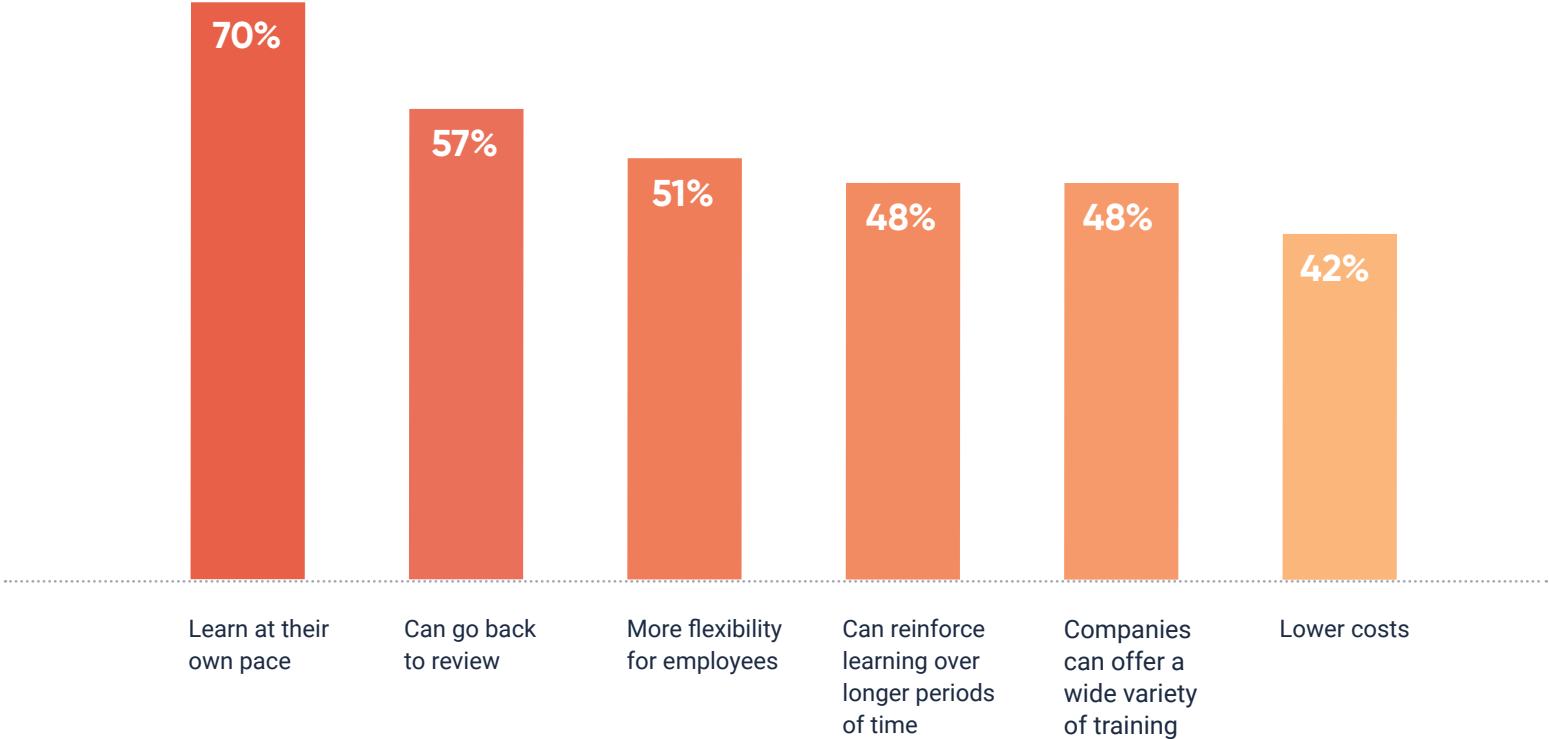
Quality held steady or improved overall

More than half of L&D leaders said quality actually improved when training went all online. The vast majority (82%) said quality did not suffer.

"Collaborative learning technologies can deliver the human engagement required to drive change, at the scale that only technology can support."

— Online Collaborative Learning for the Enterprise: The Complete Guide
NovoEd (2021)

Overall, how would you say that offering virtual training has affected the quality of your employee training?
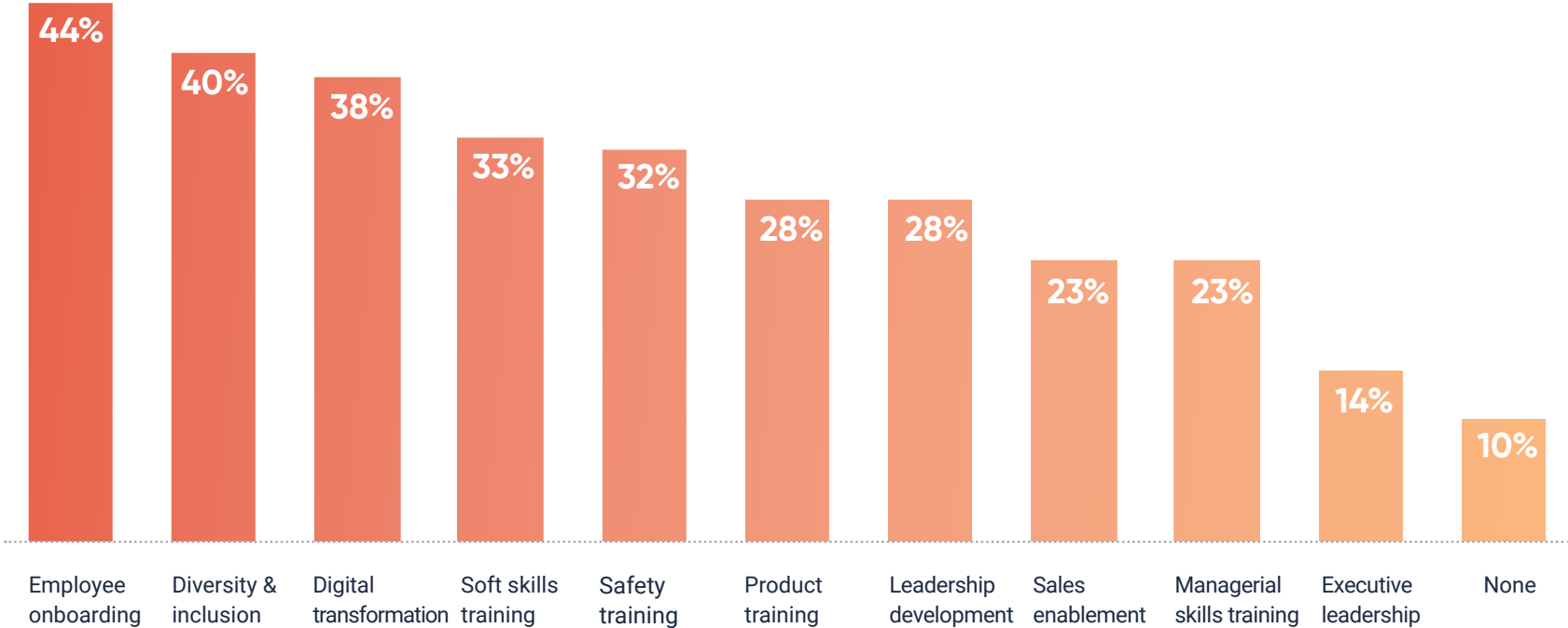
- 54%
- 28%
- 18%
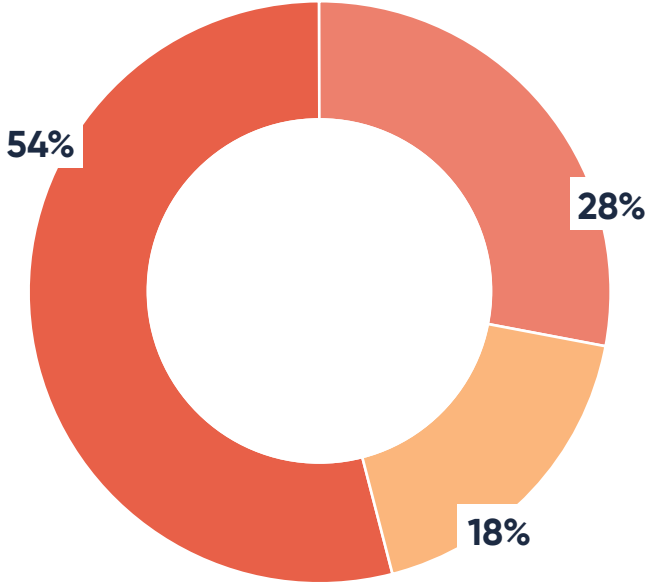
● Quality improved

● No change

● Quality suffered

How training improved

Onboarding, diversity and inclusion, and digital transformation topped the list.

Have any of the following training programs improved since going online only? (Select all that apply)

Category	Percentage
Employee onboarding	44%
Diversity & inclusion	40%
Digital transformation	38%
Soft skills training	33%
Safety training	32%
Product training	28%
Leadership development	28%
Sales enablement	23%
Managerial skills training	23%
Executive leadership	14%
None	10%

Better retention, engagement, and performance across all training types

How has going online helped the following types of training? (Select all that apply)

Employee onboarding

- Higher retention & engagement: 46%
- Better performance against goals: 44%
- Improved collaboration: 39%
- Higher NPS scores: 31%

Digital transformation

- Higher retention & engagement: 41%
- Better performance against goals: 49%
- Improved collaboration: 36%
- Higher NPS scores: 31%

Diversity & inclusion

- Higher retention & engagement: 57%
- Better performance against goals: 44%
- Improved collaboration: 39%
- Higher NPS scores: 33%

Soft skills training

- Higher retention & engagement: 47%
- Better performance against goals: 46%
- Improved collaboration: 42%
- Higher NPS scores: 30%

Product training

- Higher retention & engagement: 46%
- Better performance against goals: 51%
- Improved collaboration: 34%
- Higher NPS scores: 31%

Safety training

- Higher retention & engagement: 47%
- Better performance against goals: 44%
- Improved collaboration: 34%
- Higher NPS scores: 36%

Sales enablement

- Higher retention & engagement: 45%
- Better performance against goals: 49%
- Improved collaboration: 30%
- Higher NPS scores: 30%

Managerial skills training

- Higher retention & engagement: 44%
- Better performance against goals: 44%
- Improved collaboration: 39%
- Higher NPS scores: 32%

Legend:
- Higher retention & engagement
- Better performance against goals
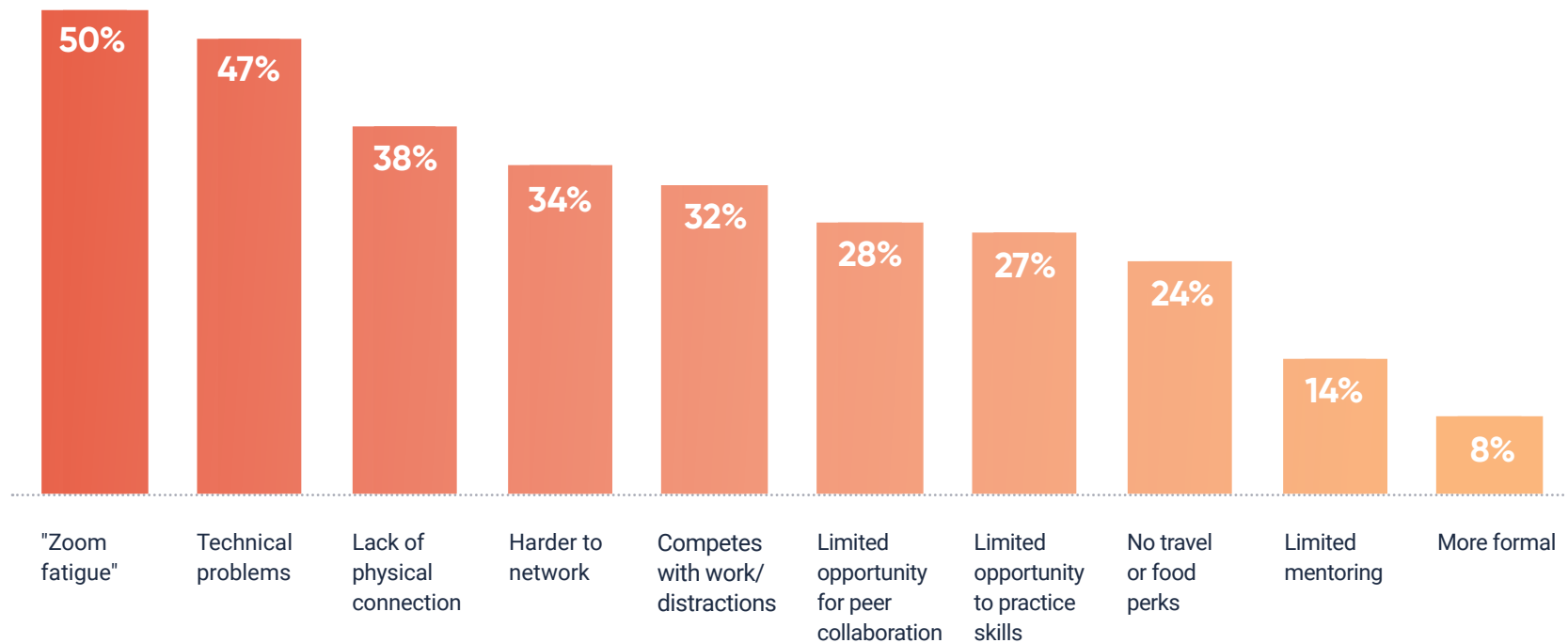- Improved collaboration
- Higher NPS scores

Improvement came with its share of challenges

Major change never occurs without challenges. Many of the issues that surfaced when going online had to do with a hurried transition, learner isolation, and a large, sudden technological change for everyone — learners, designers, and learning leaders alike.

Leaders quickly learned that trying to replicate face-to-face instructor-led training by video conference alone was difficult and much less effective. Technical difficulties were common, and long synchronous sessions led to employee fatigue and decreased retention of the learning.

In your opinion, what are reasons employees may be dissatisfied with online training? (Select all that apply)

"Zoom fatigue"	Technical problems	Lack of physical connection	Harder to network	Competes with work/ distractions	Limited opportunity for peer collaboration	Limited opportunity to practice skills	No travel or food perks	Limited mentoring	More formal
50%	47%	38%	34%	32%	28%	27%	24%	14%	8%

PREPARING FOR THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

As employees begin to return to the workplace, it's clear that the trend toward virtual and away from in-person learning that was already happening before 2020 only picked up speed.

Companies are envisioning new ways of working, and many are planning for — or have already implemented — hybrid work patterns. In this new environment, L&D leaders are tasked with designing training for cohorts of learners who are a mix of remote and at the office.

Learning leaders will need to be even more strategic and selective about what types of face-to-face training are offered, and they'll need to blend modalities to both deliver critical training to a distributed workforce and achieve their objectives.

Companies plan to spend less on ILT and more on online learning

- ● 2020
- ● 2021

38% 73% 57% 79%

Decrease spend: In-person training

Increase spend: Online learning
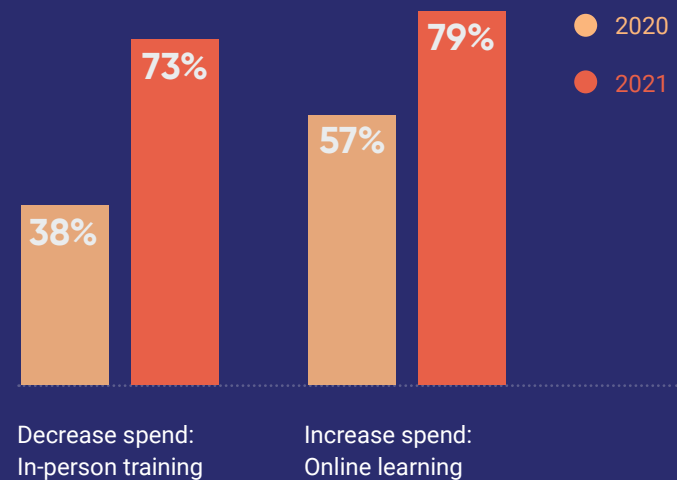
Source: LinkedIn Learning Workplace Learning Report 2021[2]

# Most corporate training will still be online by year-end

With 79% of companies still limiting travel for training and more than half of the workforce expected to remain remote at the end of 2021, learning leaders expect that few online offerings will return to in-person by year-end.

80% of L&D leaders expect that most training will remain online at the end of 2021.

- 50%
- 31%
- 9%
- 7%
- 3%

- ● Definitely
- ● Probably
- ● I don't know
- ● Probably not
- ● Definitely not
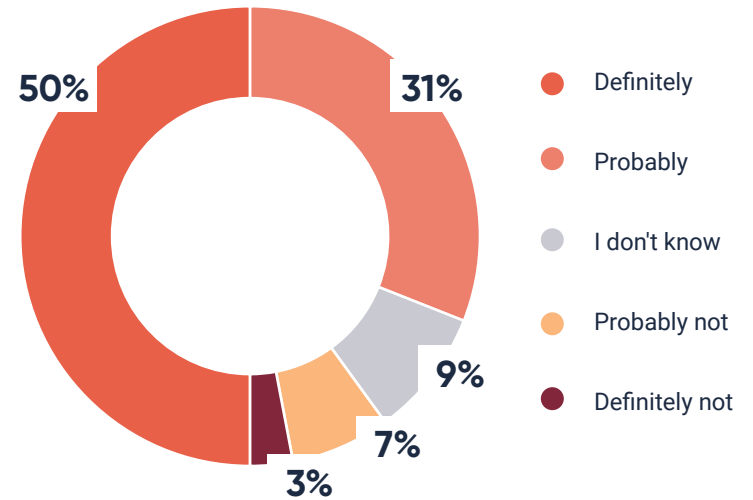
Two-thirds of training is currently online only, and most will stay that way.

67%	of training is online only today
63%	of training will "probably be online only" by the end of 2021
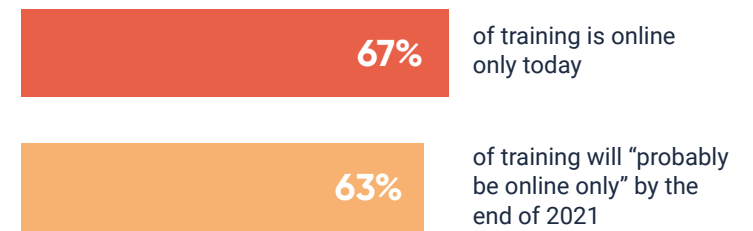
Types of training most likely to stay online

Even after employees return to the office, business-critical training programs that need to be delivered quickly at scale will remain online.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the three training types most likely to stay online are also the ones that improved the most when they were brought online.

"Onboarding as a capability is less about completing forms and more about creating the connections, context, and community."

— Online Collaborative Learning for the Enterprise: The Complete Guide NovoEd (2021)

Programs most likely to stay online after employees return to the workplace (Select all that apply)

Diversity & inclusion	Digital transformation	Employee onboarding
56%	56%	55%
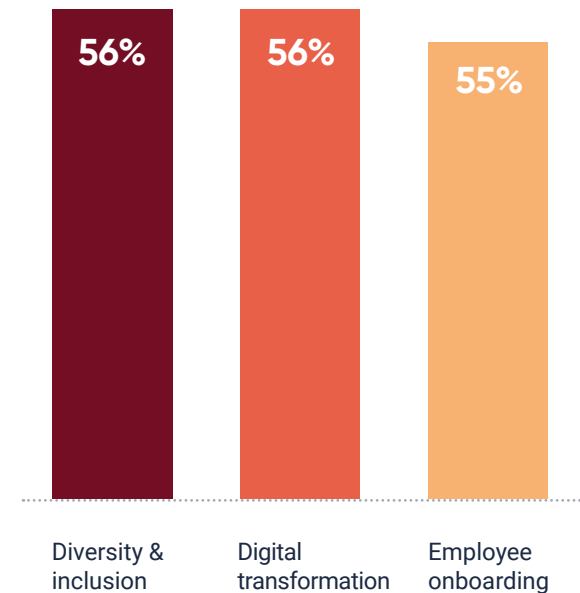
Training a hybrid workforce will require new approaches

The unique challenges of training to a mix of on-site and remote employees will require learning leaders to be creative in designing workarounds.
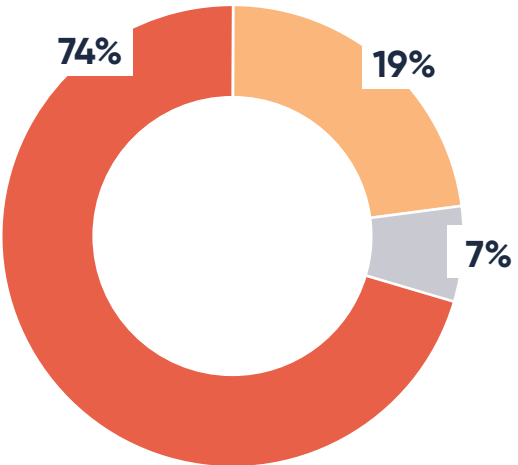
Blended online learning — a combination of virtual instructor-led training (VILT) and online learning — will be the most effective and scalable training option for the hybrid workplace going forward.

What are the types of challenges L&D leaders are concerned about? Technical difficulties, scheduling instructor-led sessions across time zones, and catering live instruction to in-person and remote learners simultaneously topped the list of challenges.
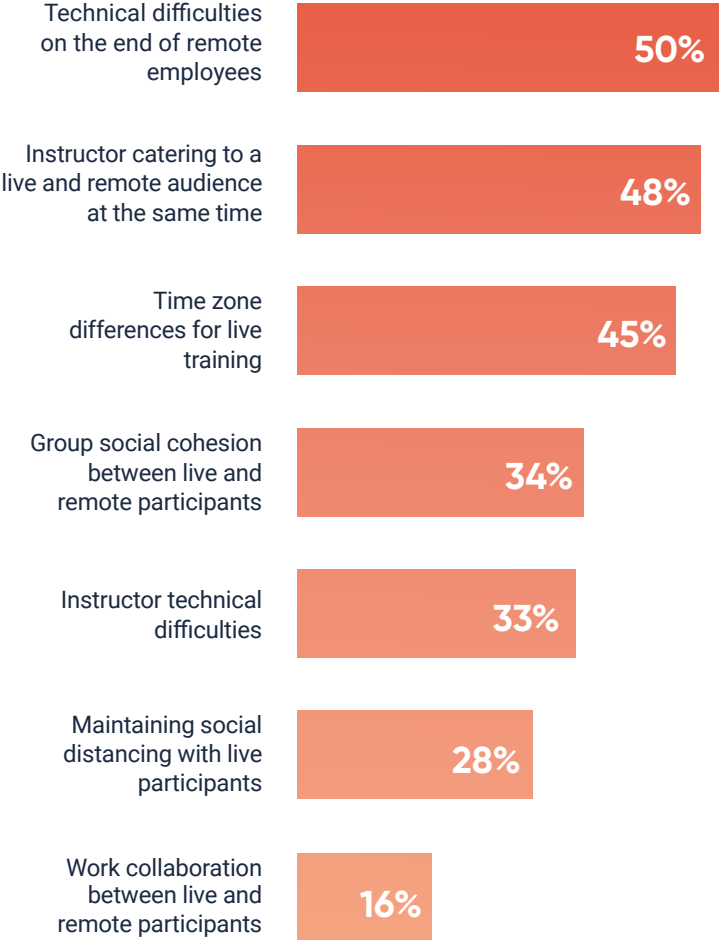
But more than one-third of leaders also said maintaining social cohesion among live and remote participants was a main challenge.

In your opinion, what are the main challenges with training a hybrid remote/in-office workforce?

Challenge	%
Technical difficulties on the end of remote employees	50%
Instructor catering to a live and remote audience at the same time	48%
Time zone differences for live training	45%
Group social cohesion between live and remote participants	34%
Instructor technical difficulties	33%
Maintaining social distancing with live participants	28%
Work collaboration between live and remote participants	16%

Scheduling training is a challenge when some employees are remote & others are in the office

74% — Yes
19% — No
7% — I don't know

BEST PRACTICES FOR CHARTING THE PATH AHEAD

Knowing what we now know, where does corporate learning and development go from here?

L&D leaders must be more strategic than ever, partnering with stakeholders to align with business priorities, understanding the modalities that are most appropriate for each type of training, and ensuring that learners are highly engaged under the new workforce operating model.

Armed with the data and lessons learned from the past year, learning leaders will be well equipped to make the most of technology to design collaborative learning experiences that build organizational capability and increase resilience throughout the workforce.

1

Use the power of technology to deliver critical business initiatives at scale

To scale business-critical training for a distributed workforce and maintain quality and outcomes, technology is essential. True transformation also requires intentional design and purposeful application.

Blended learning experiences will be key to designing the most appropriate modality for each program. With a blended approach, you can take advantage of technology to deliver collaborative asynchronous online learning in most cases, use a synchronous approach only when it's most needed, and get the best of both worlds.

Prioritize the essential enterprise programs that have proven to be most successful and scalable in a digital format:

- **Onboarding**: Before the pandemic, only 12% of companies say they had remote onboarding. Since then, 63% of all companies implemented it online for the first time.[3]

- **Diversity and inclusion:** 73% of companies in the U.S. say D&I programs are a priority.[2]

- **Digital transformation:** This is one of the top programs companies worldwide say they'll implement in 2021.[2]

"Ultimately the human capabilities for creativity, problem solving, and collaboration will provide the basis for business resilience and charting a path to our next, new normal."

— Online Collaborative Learning for the Enterprise: The Complete Guide NovoEd (2021)

Find more information and real-world tips for using blended learning to implement these types of programs in the Resources section.

2

Maximize engagement by understanding learner needs

The learning experience is key to the overall employee experience. Done well, it demonstrates to employees that the company understands what's important to them and wants to invest in their development.

Corporate learning can also cultivate self-confidence and a sense of belonging — psychological benefits found to be critical for employee engagement.[4]

To ensure that learning experiences enhance the employee experience — especially important during times of rapid change:

- **Connect learning to business priorities.** L&D is a powerful way to reinforce company goals and culture, as well as give learners a sense of how to improve their performance and contribute to organizational growth.

- **Seek learner perspectives.** Gather input from surveys and on-screen feedback mechanisms ("Was this page helpful?" or star ratings) to see where adjustments can be made and convey to employees that their opinions matter.

- **Offer a range of learning options.** With a variety of topics to explore, employees can discover skills they can apply on the job or develop for the next step in their career.
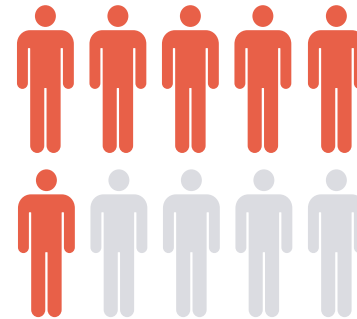
60%

of employees believe that learning helps them adapt to change
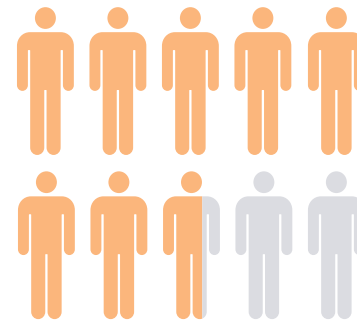
76%

of Gen Z learners believe that learning is the key to success in their careers

Source: LinkedIn Learning Workplace Learning Report 2021[2]

3 Incorporate collaboration with peers and experts into learning experiences

Research shows it again and again: When learners can connect and collaborate, they are much more engaged, develop higher-level thinking, are better prepared for real-world situations, and retain learning over the long term.

Fortunately, collaborative learning experiences can easily be deployed at scale in virtual training in a way that can't be achieved in face-to-face training.

Essential components of collaborative online learning

- PRACTICE & APPLICATION
- DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK
- TEAM-BASED LEARNING
- MENTORS & MANAGERS
- CURATED & GOAL-ALIGNED CONTENT
- EFFECTIVE FACILITATORS

Consider these strategies for effective collaboration in virtual learning:

- **Enable global networking.** Use collaborative learning technology to strengthen social cohesion across borders. Networking also allows learners to forge connections that help develop skills and advance their career.

- **Engage leaders and managers in learning.** Managers are the most important drivers of learning — not only do they model and boost learning through coaching and mentorship, they also learn for their own benefit.

- **Use technology wisely.** Streamline the number of tools you use, and be sure that learners are well trained and have access to self-help resources. IT infrastructure in learners' homes is not always up to par, so prepare for the inevitable glitches.

How does collaboration improve learning?

Research by Hewett, Becker & Bish found that human interaction in blended learning in the workplace is associated with "more active behavioral engagement, higher cognitive engagement, and stronger and more positive emotional engagement."[5]
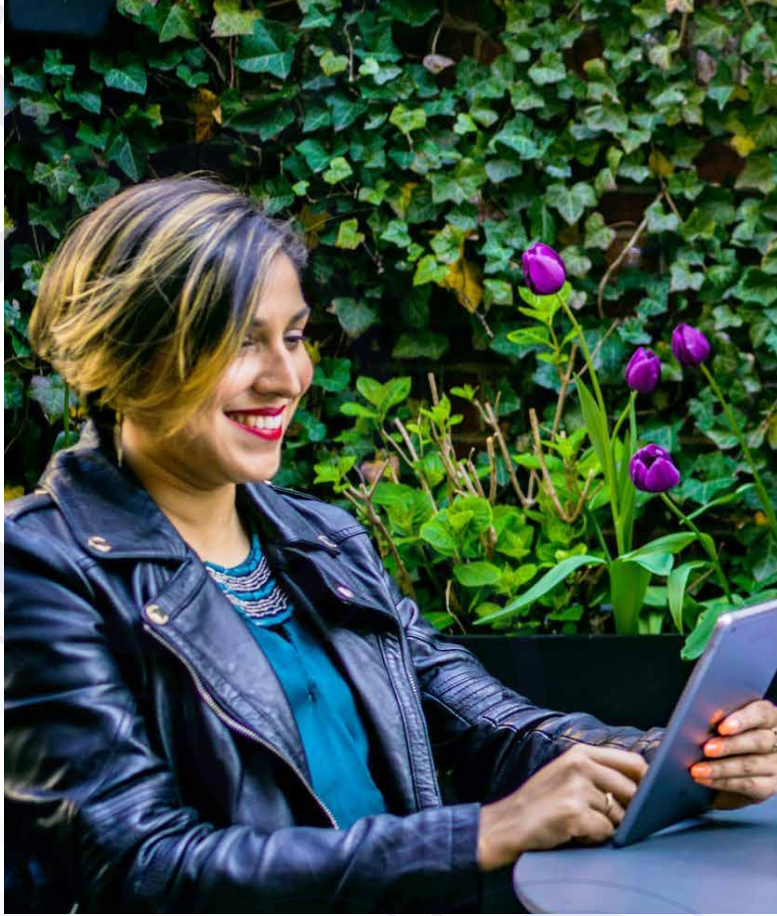
PARTING THOUGHTS

Though it's obvious things won't return to the way they used to be, the exciting news is L&D leaders have a role on center stage and are uniquely positioned to make a difference in driving their companies' competitive edge in the years to come.

With greater responsibility and a seat at the table, they're better able to engage with business leaders and stakeholders to gain a deep understanding of organizational priorities and bring their expertise to bear on strategy.

By applying best practices and lessons learned over the past year, corporate learning leaders have the tools to effect major change at their companies. They are the experts who can develop the critical skills employees need, as well as digital proficiency and resiliency, through highly effective blended learning that meets the needs of a dispersed workforce.

RESOURCES

Online Collaborative Learning for the Enterprise: The Complete Guide

Virtual Onboarding With a Human Touch: Creating Connection, Culture, and Community

The Guide to Design for Learning: Overcoming Digital Fatigue and Creating Engagement

Myths vs. Reality: Building Leadership Skills Online Infographic

REFERENCES

1 McKinsey & Co., How COVID-19 Has Pushed Companies Over the Technology Tipping Point — and Transformed Business Forever, 2020.

2 LinkedIn Learning, Workplace Learning Report 2021: Skill Building in the New World of Work.

3 Robert Half, Survey: More Than Half of Companies Hired New Staff Remotely During the Pandemic, 2020.

4 Chadwick Martin Bailey, Delivering the Psychological Benefits That Drive Employee Loyalty, 2019.

5 Hewett, Becker & Bish, Blended Workplace Learning: The Value of Human Interaction, 2018.

About the Research

This data represents findings from NovoEd's analysis of the impact of remote work on corporate learning. NovoEd commissioned an independent research firm to survey 150 learning and development leaders from enterprises with over $1billion in revenues about how remote training was better, where it struggled, and the surprising training benefits that emerged when everything was forced to go entirely online. The margin of error for this study is +/- 7.9% at the 95% confidence level. Respondents were screened and sampled in partnership with Lucid, a global leader in survey sampling.

About NovoEd

NovoEd's collaborative learning platform empowers organizations to design and deliver experiential learning that accelerates business performance on a global scale.

Since the company's founding at Stanford's social algorithm laboratory in 2012, global corporations, executive education providers, and training firms have relied on NovoEd to develop high-value capabilities through purposeful practice and application, coaching and mentorship, and group collaboration. NovoEd's proven approach to learning connects diverse groups of learners, mentors, and leaders in a high-impact online environment which unlocks an organization's collective knowledge and drives measurable outcomes.

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