

inking

RESOURCE GUIDE

Learning Agility: Are you ready for the future of learning?

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Five ways to transform learning and match new business realities

We've entered a new world of work.

During the first quarter of 2020, the global pandemic disrupted workplaces everywhere with alarming speed. Organizations of all sizes struggled with employee engagement and safety, rapidly-evolving market conditions and health guidelines, and major economic impacts to their business.

Why was the sudden workplace shift felt so acutely? Because the virus exposed systemic cracks in the communication, knowledge and learning policies, processes, and systems used by many organizations.

Consider for a moment what happens when a company relies on traditional learning practices, such as paper-based materials, eLearning accessed from shared work computers, or classroom-led training. If all employees suddenly need to be informed about new operational guidelines and policies—without holding any in-person gatherings—how can this training be created and distributed quickly?

Unfortunately, it can't be done. That's why the pandemic's impact was quickly felt by so many organizations.

The average enterprise now has **22 different learning tools/platforms.***

91% of buyers believe the working style of employees is different today and that **new approaches and technologies are needed.****

Only 34 percent of buyers believe traditional learning technologies can adapt to the needs of today's workplace.**

What's remarkable is that these systemic learning cracks have existed for many years. Over time, companies have developed ways to cover up the gaps and preserve previous investments in traditional learning systems and content, despite low adoption and poor learner satisfaction.

Unfortunately, these workarounds often resulted in poor learning experiences for employees, requiring them to search for learning they need, spend hours in a classroom, or use eLearning courses that were never designed for mobile learning in the flow of work.

Employees have been voicing frustration for quite a while, perplexed by the disconnect between their personal and professional lives. At a time when digital information and learning is always in hand with mobile devices, why are they forced to rely on outdated learning systems and techniques at work?

* 22 systems in the learning stack - Josh Bersin, Learning in the Flow of Work Keynote Video <https://joshbersin.com/2018/11/learning-in-the-flow-of-work-arriving-now>

** 91% and 34% stats were from Starr Conspiracy, Enterprise Learning Buyer Survey (2017)

What the global pandemic has crystallized is the absolute need to accelerate digital transformation and adopt learning agility in the workplace. Not only does it represent what employees want, but learning agility is what companies need in order to operate with efficiency and speed.

Why learning agility matters

Traditional learning methodologies simply can't keep up with today's pace of business. Organizations feel this reality whenever they change processes, enter new markets, or launch new products. They discover this truth when they fall behind to competitors or fail to match the velocity of innovation within their industry.

However, the overall impact usually isn't fatal, just costly. While no one wants training that's slower or less effective than expected, change requires investment and effort.

Then COVID-19 came along and exposed the embedded issues with traditional learning. With employees remote and dispersed, organizations lacked a fast and effective way to train and communicate with them on a regular basis. For example:

- How do you create, edit, and distribute learning content with speed to ensure everyone remains informed and safe during a rapidly-evolving situation?
- How do you deliver new critical workplace learning to your workforce when you rely on instructor-led classroom training?
- Without corporate email addresses, how do you send out information and updates to your workforce and ensure they've been read?

As organizations continue to grapple with these challenges, a [COVID-focused survey](#) demonstrates that 75% of Americans believe businesses are responsible for protecting employees from the virus in the workplace and ensuring employees don't spread it to the community. In addition, 63% of Americans expect at least a daily update about the virus from their employer.

As a result, human resources and learning teams now find themselves helping organizations navigate employee expectations and this new world of work. The good news is that organizational leaders are starting to fully recognize how critical it is to adapt to the speed of change demanded by the environment, the market, and the business itself.

In fact, learning agility is now being viewed less as a nice-to-have but rather as a must-have core competency. That means it's the perfect time to advocate for learning systems and processes with built-in agility. Here's everything you need to know to get started.

A woman with voluminous, dark curly hair is smiling as she looks at a tablet computer. She is wearing a bright yellow, textured turtleneck sweater. The background is a blurred office setting with a window and another person's arm visible.

Five concepts of agile learning

As employees reenter the physical workplace, the virus still poses a serious health threat. Questions swirl, such as:

- How are you training employees? How is employee learning changing to accommodate these new workplace realities?
- How can you onboard new employees? How do you reboard former employees who were furloughed or laid off?
- How can you guarantee that all new processes are learned and understood to keep employees and customers safe?
- Can you quickly and effectively launch new products or services related to the pandemic?
- Can you quickly adapt your communications and training if there are changing conditions caused by the virus?

The global pandemic has changed learning forever. Your learning requires speed and flexibility, which makes it essential to have a modern learning environment with agile processes and procedures.

But never fear: We have the five tenets you need to know to ensure delivery of agile learning for all employees, both now and in the future.

1. Trust: Single source of truth

Employees should never be confused about where to find answers while on the job. Otherwise, they are likely to fail or become disengaged. And it isn't their fault: Employees haven't been set up for success if they don't have easy access to learning in the flow of work. They can't be expected to search three or four different systems or locations.

After all, the point of employee learning is to enable them, not to test them at every turn.

And yet, according to the [2019 Brandon Hall Group L&D Benchmarking Study](#), today's content is trapped in eLearning systems (38%), PowerPoints (30%), PDFs (12%), and printed materials (9%). This reality makes training and reference content hard to find, challenging to use, and likely to be outdated and/or suffer from version control issues.

Instead, modern learning platforms provide a single source of truth. Employees know they can find the most up-to-date and reliable knowledge and training in their moment of need. With direct access to vital information and training in a single system, employees are enabled and empowered to do their jobs, and you drive speed and agility in learning.

2. Access: Anytime, anywhere

The last time you needed to learn something new or get a quick refresher on how to do something, what did you do? Chances are, you pulled out your mobile device, googled it, and watched a video.

This repetitive action is now ingrained in modern human behavior. We've become accustomed to immediate access to digital information at our fingertips, anytime and anywhere.

This social norm also points to the challenge presented by heavy eLearning courses that are delivered through a traditional LMS, as well as in-person or virtual classroom-led training. Not only are the length and formats of these learning sources incompatible with learning on-the-go, but retention rates are abysmal for memorized information, with 67% forgotten within 24 hours.

When you add in poor adoption rates for traditional learning methods and the travel time and distance required for in-person training, you find yourself throwing away a lot of money on L&D. But here's the great news: You can give modern learners the "google-like" experience they expect with your corporate learning when you adopt modern and agile learning tools.

Since the new nature of learning is active, employees find what they need, learn it, do it, and get back to work. This find-learn-do cycle has replaced the teach-study-test sequence—and that's a good thing! Research shows that retention rates improve from 5% to 30% retention in instructor-led classes to 75% to 90% retention with active learning. This form of learning also matches what employees want, with 58% preferring to learn at their own pace and 49% wanting to learn in the flow of work.

The key component for just-in-time learning is on-demand access. Given the speed of modern work, learning should be viewed as a continuous and instant activity. That means mission-critical content must be easy to review and reference on the job through laptops, tablets, and smartphones, especially for more remote and decentralized workforces.

Bonus: Learning at workspeed delivers the strong results everyone wants.

3. Speed: Instant updates & notifications

While core skills and leadership training materials are relatively static, operational learning like product, process, and services learning is evolving and changing constantly. To keep up the pace, training and reference materials must be updated regularly and with ease.

Unfortunately, heavy authoring tools only enable content updates on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, which lacks the responsiveness of a modern authoring environment. Employees are constantly at risk of using outdated or inaccurate information.

In today's business environment, everyone wants changes in procedures, updated policies, and new best practices to be shared within moments, not months. With every small edit or change, you should have the ability to distribute information to all employees immediately. Only modern, digital, and mobile-ready content achieves this requirement and enables authoring, distribution, and instant updates.

In addition to rapid authoring tools, the pandemic has demonstrated how crucial it is to have communication capabilities built into your learning solution. It should be easy to send notifications and alerts to all employees, regardless of whether they have a business email address. Hand-in-hand with this capability is your ability to track who has seen the updates and notifications to ensure the entire workforce remains informed at all times.

4. Relevance: Custom content

While some training may be standardized (i.e., pandemic-related health policies and guidelines from the government), the majority of your learning content should be specific to your business. Custom content supports what's special about your organization, injects relevance into every piece of learning, and reinforces your competitive advantage.

That also explains why learning should be contextualized and account for different audiences. One size doesn't fit all learners, and employees are looking for just-in-time and just-for-me learning that matches their immediate needs and provides a learner-centric experience.

Content and its delivery format must be highly accessible for each learner's needs and provide exactly what makes the most sense at the right time. Content should offer opportunities for employees to build skills as part of their work rather than separate from it. [RedThread's 2018 "Humanizing Learning" study](#) discovered that 71% of more evolved organizations build learning opportunities into their work, while only 16% of less evolved organizations do the same.

What's clear is that the typical eLearning courses with the prevalent "next" button have less and less relevance in the new world of work. Learners want modern and digital content experiences that are engaging and only a click away, such as videos, interactive graphics, augmented reality, and on-the-job exercises. In fact, [Brandon Hall Group](#) found that 79% of high-impact organizations cite video learning as the highest impact content tool and technology.

In the future, we expect even more interactive learning experiences, including 3-D models, video games, augmented reality, and virtual reality. The latter (AR/VR) are poised to experience a rise in adoption with the need for social distancing and less in-person training.

5. Adoption: Complete visibility

This final tenet of learning agility is pretty straightforward: Learning cannot be effective if your learning processes, content, and systems are not being used by employees.

In the new world of work, organizations can't afford the historically-low adoption rates associated with traditional learning systems. And, when something unexpected happens (say, a global pandemic), those systems are rendered useless if they are only accessible within the walls of your organization.

What's needed are modern learning solutions that inspire high learner adoption rates and provide data-driven insights into employee engagement and performance. When content is digital, you can track learning across the organization—down to teams, locations, and individuals. With visibility into the effectiveness of your learning processes and content, it's easy to address which employees need help and what content changes should be made to improve training.

Adoption of your learning solution is a necessity in the new world of work. When your employees are up-to-date and informed, you ensure the health and wellness of your workforce, as well as their engagement.

The new world of work demands built-in learning agility

As organizations contemplate what it takes to bring employees back to work, and as frontline employees continue to serve customers during these uncertain times, it's important to make sure vital information ends up directly in the hands of employees at all times.

One thing is clear: Only a modern, digital learning solution can achieve the learning agility needed to keep everyone safe.

Even under pre-COVID circumstances, organizations were dealing with workforces where 80% of employees are deskless, and only 6% of all learning content is designed for mobile learning. That means learning was not being delivered to the majority of these workforces.

To ensure you have an audience for your learning, it's time to provide a learning experience that's relevant and accessible. It's too easy for employees to grab a phone and access Google if mission-critical content and real-time learning aren't provided on the job.

And it's pretty safe to say that no organization wants Google training its employees.

While the global pandemic will eventually ebb away, the reverberations will be felt for a long time. If one positive comes out of the experience, it should be a heightened awareness around the need for learning agility and the decision to provide a modern learning environment with mobility, speed, and accessibility that employees can trust.