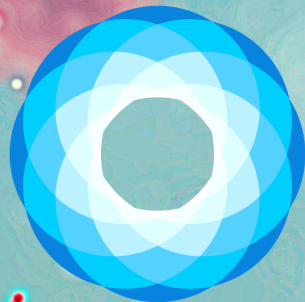


The impact of COVID-19 on L&D



optimus
LEARNING

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Sample size - 106 internal L&D professionals.

The impact of COVID-19 on L&D

COVID-19 has been the biggest social-economic event of most people's lifetime.

We designed this survey to help learning professionals understand the impact of COVID-19 on L&D activity and strategy and to provide useful context and peer knowledge at this time.

The results are broken into three sections; REACT, RELATE, RESPONSE, covering recent timelines, how employees are being supported and the future plans for L&D. We hope that they help provide you with useful insights and inspiration.

The use of technology has shown many businesses new ways of working and learning using digital tools. However we must be mindful that during lean times history tells us that companies reduced investment in people and development. Therefore, it is time for learning professionals to continue to add value, to experiment with methods that might have previously been resisted, and make a compelling case for investment in L&D.

Keep positive and focus on learning to thrive.

Blake Henegan

Managing Director

STAGE 1 - REACT

Very few people forecast the impact that COVID-19 would have on the ways of working in the UK.

However, once it was clear that lock down and social distancing were coming and subsequently announced learning professionals reacted quickly.

Over 70% switched face to face training to virtual delivery where possible, followed by a similar number (69%) postponing sessions and creating new online learning (64%).

Necessity was the mother of invention, with the need to continue developing people forcing people to try digital methods, with 25% reporting they have taken the plunge and run virtual training for the first time.

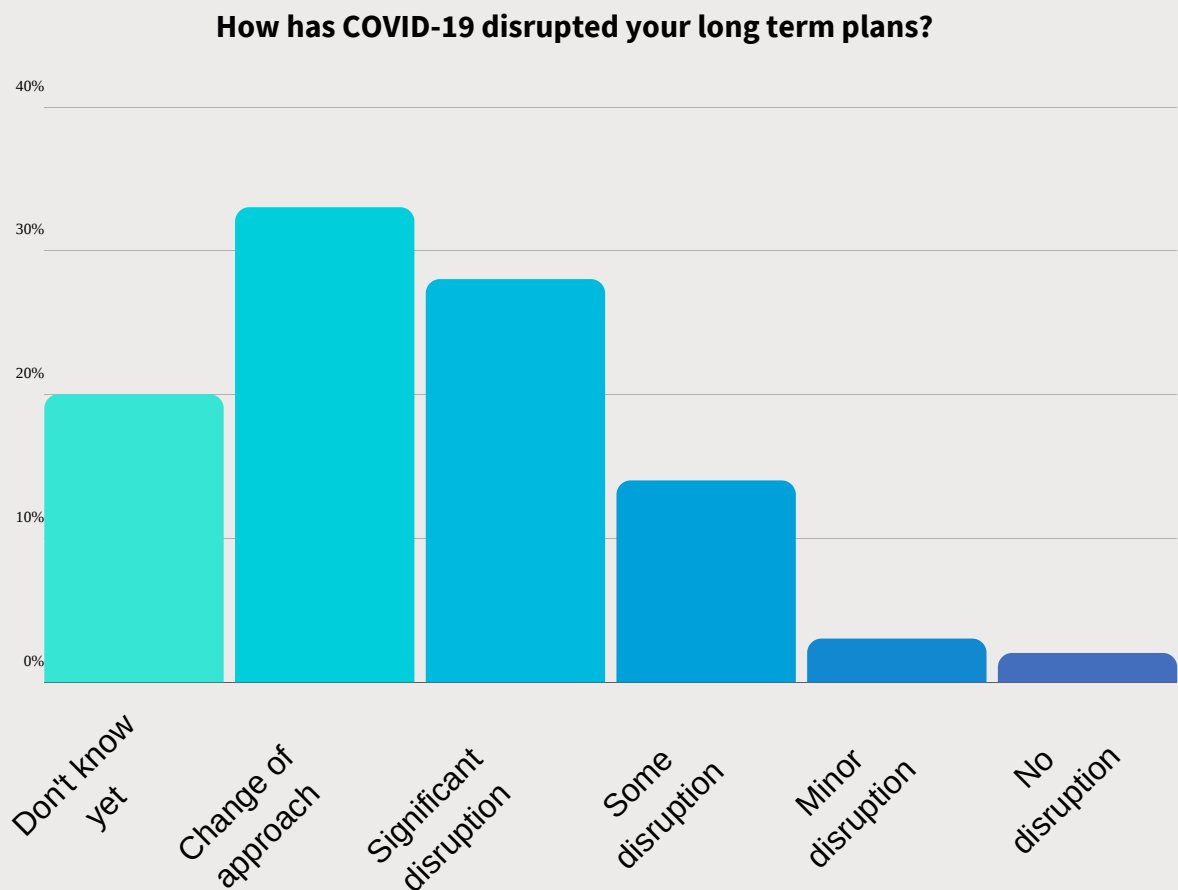
What impact has recent events had on the delivery of your L&D activity?



Disruption

97.7% of respondents reported some level of disruption – most reported a change of approach and then significant disruption. This ties in with the answers on the impact of delivery.

Interestingly a fifth said they don't know yet what impact COVID-19 will have on their long-term plans.



"Grieve for your beautiful annual L&D plan then move on and respond to immediate support needs"

- L&D Manager, Public Sector

The ideal time to learn

"Work out what appetite your staff have for development; encourage people to consider development not just immediate skills; use the opportunity to try new things"
– L&D Manager, Housing Association

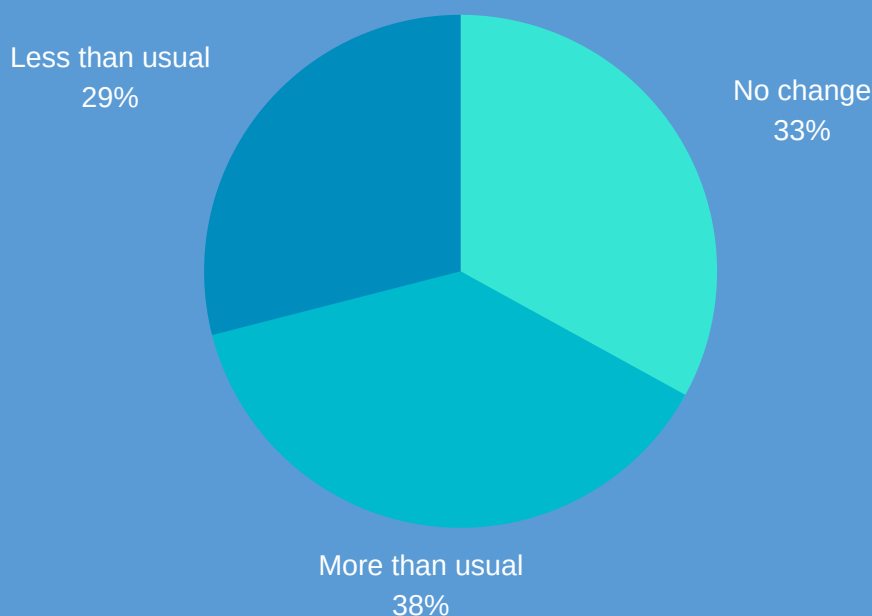
The results show that more employees have more time and a greater appetite for learning than usual, therefore what support and opportunities can you provide to them right now?

Not surprising, in our opinion, though is that almost a third have less time than usual which can be explained by reasons including covering furloughed employees workload and focusing on business critical activities.

Furloughed employees, in theory, have more time for development due to favourable government rules that allow learning (as long as employees don't carry out revenue generating or service delivery activity) , but is this happening? Those employees who haven't been furloughed find themselves under pressure – covering roles, having to produce results, working remotely.

Have you compared your employee learning activity versus pre COVID-19?

What is your employees' capacity and appetite for development right now?

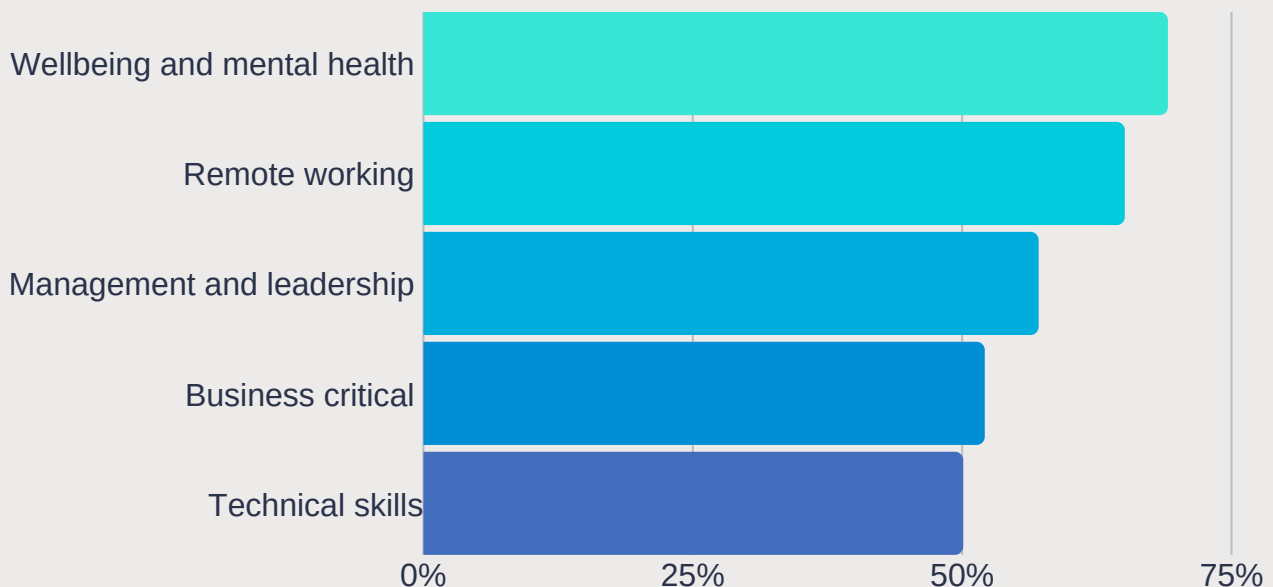


STAGE 2 - RELATE

Once the initial shock and reactive stage was passed, the attention could turn to providing support to the business and employees.

Supporting employees

When asked what areas of development internal L&D professional are supporting the business with, the following responses were the most common;



The top two, wellbeing & mental health and remote working are connected. Significant changes and upheaval combined with increased worry for loved ones, health and job security will cause anxiety and stress. Stories of sharing space with family members, home schooling and supporting isolated family members are prevalent. It's great to see such a proactive and empathetic approach.

Management and leadership are always a key focus for business, and this hasn't changed, appearing third on the list. Managing remote teams and employees presents a different set of challenges and opportunities and can highlight a manager's strengths and weaknesses. Support for this group is needed more than ever in this period of crisis management.

Business critical learning and technical skills complete the top 5 areas of development. Focusing on the short term needs for the business is a necessity. Whilst we go through this period of uncertainty you'll need to provide suitable development opportunities to motivate employees and ensure that decision makers and leaders recognise that continued development in employees could create a competitive edge for the company.

Make sure you have what you need to inspire everyone in your business to think beyond the present.

Challenges for L&D

There are still challenges for learning professionals to ensure employees and the business have support to develop, whilst adapting and planning with changing conditions and uncertainty.

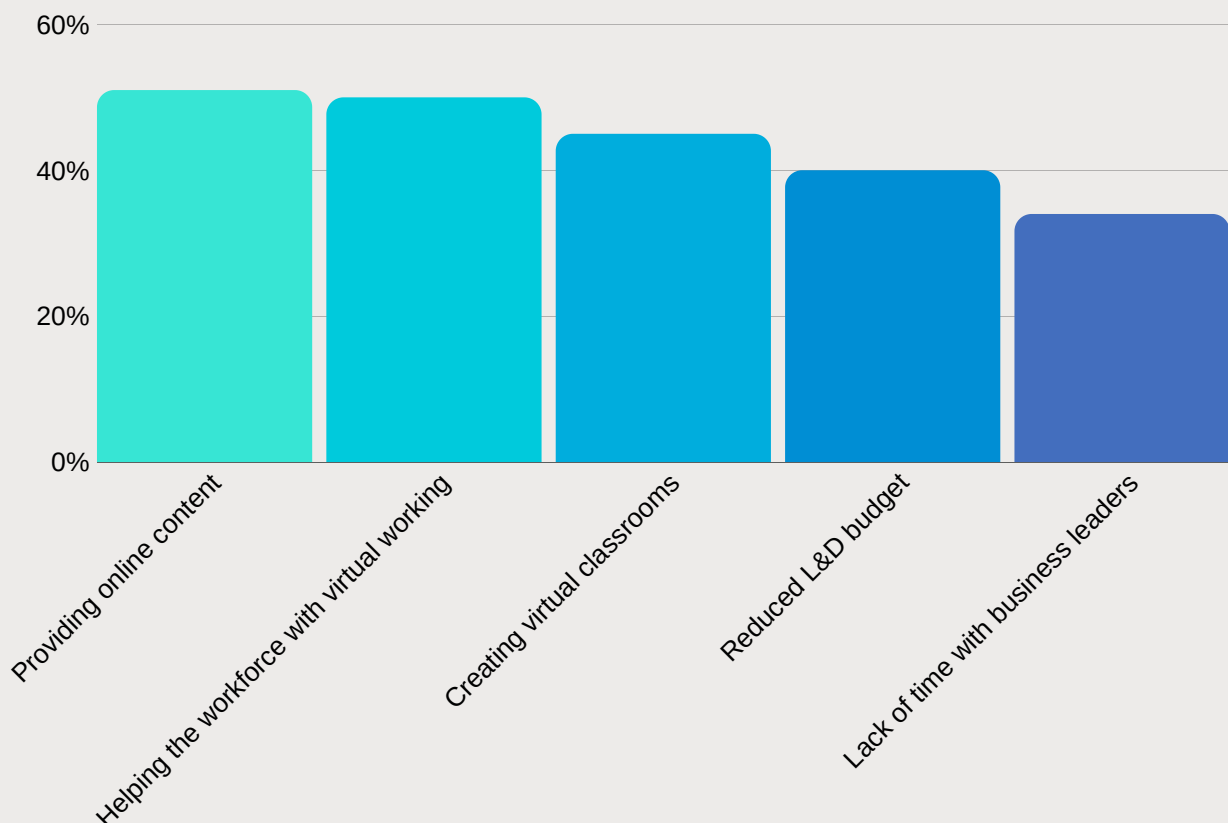
Just over half of respondents highlighted that providing online learning was their biggest challenge. Close behind was helping the workforce with their remote working.

Providing online learning content requires planning, development and maintenance, considering what will help employees upskill, or simply retain skill level and wellbeing.

There is a vast array of online learning content but what is right for your company? You will need time to review content and to focus on careful curation. In addition, encourage and use your own employees to share useful content on your LMS, learning platform and social groups.

Creating virtual classrooms is third on the list of challenges. Many L&D professionals, trainers and employees will be experiencing virtual classrooms for the first time. When preparing and running virtual classrooms be mindful of the audience, the content and the timings. Focus on engagement and user participation. Remember, not all classroom workshop content will work in a virtual format. If this is new to you, where can you get the best support and who can you learn from? Be honest with your audience, get feedback, be open minded and continuously improve.

What are your main challenges now?

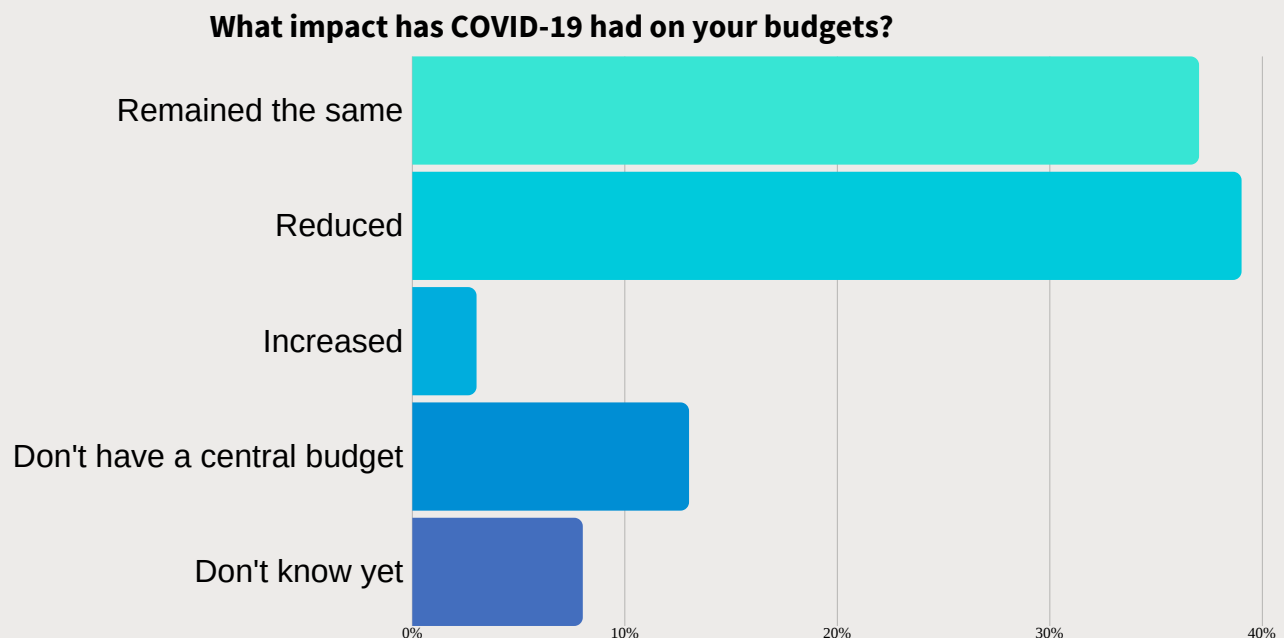


The impact on L&D teams and the industry

There are going to be hard times ahead for the L&D industry with already over 40% of respondents reporting reductions in budgets. Will this worsen as the economic impact of lockdown and other measures are felt?

Companies in the Professional Services, Financial, Retail and Wholesale and Manufacturing sectors were the most common for responding that their budgets have been cut.

Two different groups of respondents have reported reduced L&D budgets are their most common challenge - 1 person L&D teams (60% of respondents) and large teams (21 plus people, 45% respondents).



Furlough and the impact on the team

40% of respondents have confirmed members of the L&D team have been furloughed and 50% reported furloughing across the business. Some respondents mentioned that their whole team have been furloughed.

What are your plans if you have lost or will lose internal expertise and knowledge? Where can you turn to replace or hire these skills in the future? What about the impact on the workload?

Naturally, there are concerns for all involved in the learning and development sector – internal and external. We've already been informed of job losses, consolidation and companies looking to cut back.

Are you close enough to the senior decision makers to understand their plans and commitment to invest in people development? What is going to help you when negotiating and influencing?

STAGE 3 - RESPONSE

All of us are working in uncertain times, reacting to ever changing advice, information and policy. Many businesses are operating below usual performance, focusing purely on business critical activities. During this times it can be easy to get stuck in reactive mode but some time must be spent looking at the longer term strategy.

Planning for multiple scenarios

Do you know what your business forecasts and scenario planning are? Find out. What about predictions from research bodies and companies?

This allows you to start creating your own plans based on different scenarios. This doesn't need to be complicated, create a few scenarios - worse case, best case and middle ground. Consider what will be needed at each one - resources, people management, financial implications etc.

Take time to review these against updates and changes, checking on what you know now that you didn't previously, adjusting your plans accordingly.

Make a case for investment

Whilst L&D cannot dictate financial policy of the company, it is their responsibility to provide an argument to the senior management team to continue to invest in development.

Highlight how upskilling can motivate employees, use previous internal successes and highlight case studies of companies who thrived during previous hardships as a result of investing in people. Upskilling employees will become more important if there are recruitment freezes or redundancies.

If you are purchasing from external suppliers then consider what investment you need and how you'll be able to show the results to the business.

Remember...

"There are still multiple opportunities out there, many courses have transitioned online & there are opportunities to take advantage of low-cost learning and communication platforms "

– L&D and Talent Management, Financial Services

Consider the learning mix

Avoid the temptation to attempt to shoehorn face to face learning into a digital format. Consider what other methods of learning resources you can make available for your employees. Books, videos, podcasts, mentoring, coaching, peer learning groups, chats, social learning, online communities are just some examples.

Consider how face to face will blend with digital when people want to get together to share their experiences. So, consider how you can use it best to improve your employees development.

Where will it add most value?

A robust learning strategy will incorporate all of the above - the methods of delivery are just some of the tools at your disposal, not the starting point.

What have you set up to help employees communicate and share knowledge with each other?

Questions with intent

Speak to your business, managers and leadership team. Ask about the business conditions and situation. Ask the business what is needed for now and the longer term? Ask questions which relate to your own scenario planning. Ask what do we know, what has changed, how has it changed?

"Ensure you are shifting the conversation away from training and more towards performance consulting. If you can do anything now, then make sure it is useful! "

- Head of Learning, Transportation

Repurpose and create

What content do you have, or can find, that you can share? What internal resources and knowledge is there in your company that can be shared? Do you have peers that you can share content with? Understanding the saturated online learning marketplace takes time, so who can you trust to help you? Use your networks, social media and suppliers to learn what is available externally.

By finding out about the business needs, you can create and curate suitable resources and provide relevant guidance.

"Push towards digital & tech - it's the only future. If you face barriers, go under the radar then show results. It's a difficult way to do things, but people quickly forget you've gone ahead with something which hasn't been discussed when you're showing positive results"

- L&D Manager, Social Care

Are you ready

Good news for the industry. Just over half of respondents say they have the internal skills required to achieve their goals during the current climate.

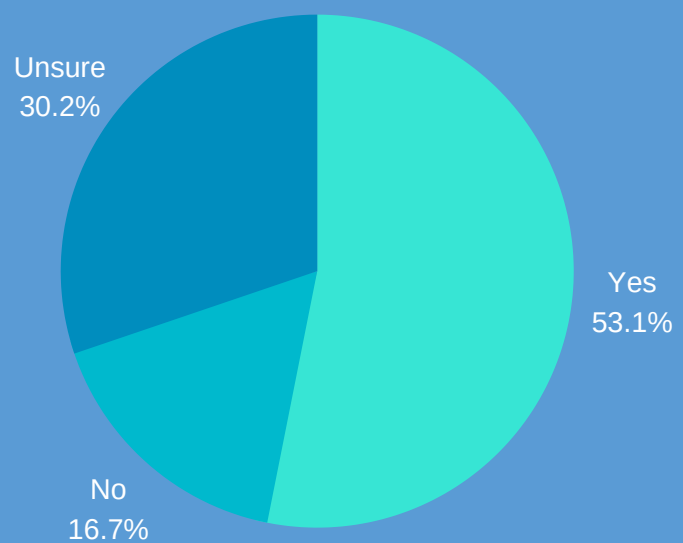
But what about the rest?

One third are unsure and less than a fifth say no. One person L&D teams are less certain, only 36% saying yes and 45% unsure if they have the skills and expertise. That is a worryingly high number, especially when this same group are expected to be both strategic and operational.

L&D do not need to have all the skills and expertise. But they do need to know the skills they lack and develop them quickly, find the right people who do or a combination of both.

The power of your networks, internally and externally, are going to be crucial.

Do you and your internal team have the skills and expertise required to achieve your goals during the current climate and beyond?



The skills for L&D to thrive

These are the core skills that are important for L&D to have, gain or outsource during the current times.

Technology knowledge

Knowing about online learning and digital platforms, LMS, LXP, communication tools, digital apps is a must. Understanding how to build and procure the right learning technology is crucial if you can't develop this internally. Learn from your colleagues in IT.

Content curation

With so much online content available, the challenge is identifying and separating the great from the poor. Especially for those working on reduced budgets or with reduced team numbers. There is a skill in being able to find suitable content, in a timely manner. What resources do you have? Who do you know who does this well?

Resource management

Budgets, people, systems and time will all be tested. If you need to use additional resource outside of the L&D team you need to know where to look, how to select the right options, whilst monitoring performance against agreed targets. This applies when using internal resources as much as it does when using external suppliers.

Data analysis

As highlighted earlier, L&D budgets are under pressure, so L&D need to understand the impact of their activity on the business. Are you able to demonstrate any level of ROI or financial benefits? Understanding data to help shape the future and your strategy is important. What can you obtain and use from your LMS?

Communication management

Being visible with your business is a necessity now. Does your communication meet the needs of your business? What messages are you conveying? How often are you speaking with senior management and stakeholders? How about with employees, furloughed employees and external partners?

Advice from other L&D professionals

A sincere thank you to those who took the time to contribute. There were excellent pieces of advice, covering similar topics and wishing others well. Below is a selection we know will help you.

Lets continue to support one another and come through this stronger.

Think commercially

Consider the financial implications for your business. What can you do to generate revenue for the business? Directly and indirectly. What about cost savings - without sacrificing quality. Do you have lengthy elearning contracts you can renegotiate?

Be creative

How can you spread your budget further? Ask this question even if your budget hasn't been cut. Are there others in your sector that you can work with to share resources? Will this see a new demand for bartering? Look for knowledge internally. Get employees to share with and help each other.

Be agile

"Being agile is essential. don't be protective over historic content and material!"

"Get busy learning how to be more agile with impactful virtual delivery"

"Embrace the change, it will help showcase L&D"

"Embrace online platforms and trust learners to learn, even if it might take a different approach"

Show gratitude

"Take the opportunity to congratulate your teams for their adaptability and resilience"

"Look after suppliers who have helped you with recent times and for the future"

Pivot and adapt

"If you can't deliver now as the business has more pressing concerns, use the time to develop content/initiatives that are ready to go when things return to normal"

"Think about the plan for after lockdown, we don't want to just react when returning. We need a plan and ensure we support employees with both their skills but also their wellbeing"

"Find a way to make the business case for L&D after the immediate COVID-19 crisis is over. It is likely that many firms will drastically reduce their L&D function at a time when it is more important than ever to support their staff"

"Create and publish a future focussed strategy and sell in the value you can provide in readying the workforce for the new normal (whatever that will look like). I also view change management as being an invaluable part of future L&D strategy"

Focus on the positive

"Start to re-think what the future opportunity is - we will all change as a result of this, what is the impact for L&D and how do we optimise this situation"

"Keep the training going, vital for giving those working from home structure and a feeling of team spirit"

"Look for the opportunities in all of this"

"Use the situation to drive change in and methodology - if you have too many lemons make lemonade"

Make yourself valuable

"Just keep going, keep presenting new ideas, keep sending hints and tips, use the L&D community around you"

"Refocus on performance support. Avoid knee jerk reactions about content heavy online learning"

"Use this as leverage to fundamentally challenge and accelerate changes in learning"

"Be strategic and not to jump on the everything virtual route. Remember what you know about blended learning and there are more options than just face to face or live online learning"

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Since 2009 we have provided outsourced learning and development services for UK companies.

Working in partnership with L&D professionals and businesses we are here to help compare the marketplace for you and ensuring you receive the best value training and learning for your employee requirements.

If you are looking for digital learning, virtual training courses, quality trainers and facilitators, e-learning or coaches and want advice we will help you. We work with over 1500 providers, offering virtual classroom training, e-learning, digital learning content as well as traditional across all business training subjects.

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