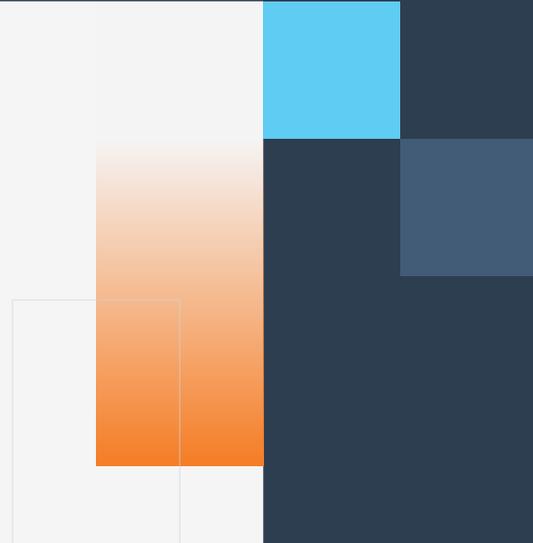




# Five Shifts

## Impacting the Future of Workplace Learning



# Overview

## SUMMARY:

Learning and development has evolved significantly over the past ten years. Many of the advancements have been tied to new technologies, borrowing from other industries and disciplines like marketing and design thinking, and important shifts in the way people work and learn. According to Deloitte:



Rapid and ongoing changes in the nature of work itself are changing the relationship between learning and work, making them more integrated and connected than ever before. This creates a challenge and an opportunity to build robust work-centered learning programs, helping people consume information and upgrade their skills in the natural course of their day-to-day jobs.<sup>1</sup>

This white paper examines the key shifts happening in the workforce today, the opportunities opening up for organizations, an evolving point of view on what makes effective workplace learning, and a vision for how organizations can adapt to meet the needs of learners.

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# Overview

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The workforce is more motivated to learn and master skills than ever before. Organizations must adapt their learning strategy to embed skill development into the workplace and equip employees to work-to-learn.
- Workers need easy access to proven methods for building and mastering skills beyond their current job descriptions, with a special focus on human skills that will be widely applicable across the workforce.
- Learning technology must evolve to seamlessly facilitate self-directed learning, knowledge sharing, and skill building driven by the employee and supported by L&D, managers, and the business.
- Organizations must renew their focus on surfacing, building, and curating learning experiences with maximum impact.
- Organizations must move toward a more holistic approach to measurement that reveals insights into ongoing learning, skill building, and on-the-job performance over time, propelled by iterative coaching and feedback.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Find ways to make connections between the experts and novices in your organization that don't exist today.
- Design an upskilling strategy that focuses on human skills.
- Evolve your thinking beyond a content library. Access to course content is easy to come by, but don't forget the essential wrap-around components that take foundational knowledge and turn it into real opportunity for skill building.
- Start gathering data. Select a pilot initiative or program to test how you might gather and analyze data. Keep iterating on your approach as you go, and then create a plan to scale.
- Forge partnerships with IT, HR, and other groups in the business who can open up access to relevant data that already exists.
- Enhance your existing learning platform to meet user expectations and empower employees to work-to-learn and grow holistically.

# Introduction

In 2020, the only thing constant was change, and the rate of it continues to accelerate day after day. With so much uncertainty in the economy and in the workforce, organizations of all types have been focused on surviving and retaining as many of their people as possible.

Many businesses have shifted their models to balance productivity and meeting the needs of their people first; they are striving to facilitate and support teams to experiment and learn quickly while enabling Skill Agility™ for their organizations moving forward. More workers than ever have been forced to redirect or extend their skillsets and respond to challenges with more resilience, more adaptability, more comfort with ambiguity, and more focus. Workplace learning has taken on new and different forms to meet the needs of a highly dispersed workforce working in the midst of intense distraction and stress.

But even before 2020, deep underlying shifts were beginning to impact workplace learning. As we examined how organizations are responding and adapting, we homed in on the core shifts causing much of the transformation and opportunity in the workforce today. These shifts will impact learning approaches and strategy throughout 2021 and beyond.

Let's dig in and consider how organizations should be ready to respond.



## SKILL AGILITY™

Noun | The ability to rapidly identify and acquire skills in response to changing business needs

# Shifts in the Workforce and Workplace Learning

## SHIFT 1: FROM LEARN-TO-WORK TO WORK-TO-LEARN

For the first time, the percentage of the American population age 25 or older that completed high school or higher levels of education has reached 90 percent.<sup>2</sup> This represents significant growth; in 1940, only 24% had finished high school or more. Today, a high school education is seen as a requirement for many jobs in the modern economy, which helps explain the increase.

Although the current and future workforce is more likely to be well educated, there is a decline in the perceived value that higher education brings, especially in preparing students for jobs of the future. Many organizations believe that higher education alone doesn't provide the skills students need to succeed in the modern workplace.<sup>3</sup> In fact, 38% of people say universities are having a negative impact.<sup>4</sup>



OF THE AMERICAN POPULATION AGE 25 OR OLDER HAS COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL OR HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION **TODAY**<sup>2</sup>



OF THE AMERICAN POPULATION AGE 25 OR OLDER COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL OR HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION **IN 1940**



**FOUR-IN-TEN PEOPLE SAY UNIVERSITIES ARE HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT**<sup>4</sup>



At the same time, the next wave of the workforce places a higher value on learning and skill building than ever before.<sup>5</sup> People now rate the “opportunity to learn” among their top reasons for taking a job.<sup>6</sup> Older generations may have different motivations, but as retirement age increases, Baby Boomers are seeing the need for continuous learning and adaptation to remain competitive in the workforce as well.

This shifts the burden to businesses to create opportunities for continuous learning, mastering, and sharing of new skills inside the organization. Learning and development must extend beyond traditional avenues of knowledge acquisition, such as articles and courses, and incorporate intentional on-the-job skill building and mentorship. L&D teams cannot accomplish this shift alone. To remain competitive in the rapidly changing marketplace, executives, managers, and individuals must work together to cultivate a continuous learning culture.



## **BOTTOM LINE:**

**The workforce is more motivated to learn and master skills than ever before. Organizations must adapt their learning strategy to embed skill development into the workplace and equip employees to work-to-learn.**

The idea of a continuous learning culture may feel like a trend, but the principles behind it are critical to enabling organizations to adapt and grow. A strong culture of learning encourages employees on their independent and collective quests for knowledge, aligned toward the mission and goals of the organization. When working successfully, learning and upskilling happen on the job every day, not only in designated learning times that feel separated from business context.

We believe organizations must adapt their learning strategy to equip employees to work-to-learn.



## HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION:

- **Evaluate how your organization is doing today in creating a learning culture. To what extent have you prioritized it, made it possible, celebrated it, and modeled it? Where do you have room for improvement?**
- **Normalize instant feedback loops. After an employee tries something new, encourage peers and managers to provide constructive feedback in the moment to encourage on-the-job learning.**
- **Find one specific way to make connections between the experts and novices in your organization that don't exist today. If this isn't something you're used to doing, start small at the team level.**

## SHIFT 2: FROM JOB SKILLS TO HUMAN SKILLS

To remain competitive, businesses must enable skill agility in their workforce by building durable skills that will be valuable even as business needs shift. Today, durable skills are human skills (also known as power skills). Human skills are ways of thinking and being that allow us to manage our own mental health and navigate social situations with others.

This include things like social/emotional skills, higher cognitive skills, strategic thinking, decision making, resilience, and adaptability, which are widely applicable regardless of role. These skills are no longer nice to have but critical for workers to master. Workers will need “no-regrets” skill sets<sup>7</sup> that will be useful and widely applicable despite the coming challenges:

- Jobs requiring new skillsets<sup>8</sup>
- Jobs becoming obsolete<sup>9</sup>
- A shift from a product to services model<sup>10,11</sup>
- Key responsibilities being supplemented or automated by artificial intelligence<sup>12</sup>



**OF ALL JOBS WILL REQUIRE SIGNIFICANT RESKILLING OR UPSKILLING IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS<sup>8</sup>**



**SAY THEIR ORGANIZATIONS ARE CURRENTLY REDESIGNING JOBS<sup>9</sup>**



**14% OF THE US ECONOMY TODAY IS PROFESSIONAL OR WHITE-COLLAR SERVICES RELATED, AND GROWING<sup>10</sup>**  
**80% OF TOTAL US JOBS ARE SERVICES-RELATED<sup>11</sup>**



**EXPECT TO ELIMINATE CERTAIN JOBS DUE TO AUTOMATION OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS<sup>12</sup>**

The shelf-life of traditional skills is shortening,<sup>13</sup> and in-demand skills will continue to evolve. According to Josh Bersin:



The skills of the future are not technical, they're behavioral. Yes, engineers, designers, and technical people need to know how to build and fix things (and we all have to know how to use our computers, tools, and systems at work). But as the research points out, CEOs and business leaders are now realizing that they can "buy" these technical skills (or build them internally, at ever-lower cost) relatively easily. It's the soft skills or "power skills" that take effort.<sup>14</sup>

Take the pharmaceuticals industry, which is currently transitioning its business focus from products to services. Pharma companies are no longer just drug providers selling products; they are partners in patient health who provide life-long health solutions and services in diagnostics, health monitoring, prevention, etc. This shift requires upskilling for nearly everyone involved, from pharma executives to sales representatives to scientists, who all must acquire new skills like design-thinking, sense-making, systems thinking, and consultative selling.



## BOTTOM LINE:

**Workers need easy access to proven methods for building and mastering skills beyond their current job descriptions, with a special focus on human skills that will be widely applicable across the workforce.**

The B2B industry has also seen the products to services shift impact how they partner with clients and what skills are needed from their teams. For example, in the learning and development industry, organizations get real value from individual products created by content and technology vendors, but the deeper value comes from the service that groups provide in integrating these products to create holistic learning experiences.<sup>15</sup> Organizations are looking for vendors that go beyond providing products and, instead, create partnership through service: understand needs, customize and configure the products accordingly, provide hands-on support for issues and troubleshooting, and partner to design strategy and solve problems—all service opportunities requiring social and emotional skills, higher cognitive skills like strategic thinking and analysis, and a good measure of adaptability.

Human skills are highly interrelated and highly collaborative. They are not linear and take years to learn. People use and grow human skills in tandem with those around them through discussion, debate, challenging situations, and immersive experiences.

We believe workers need easy access to proven methods for building and mastering skills beyond their current job descriptions, with a special focus on human skills that will be widely applicable across the workforce.



## HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION:

- **Design an upskilling strategy that focuses on human skills.**
- **Evolve your thinking beyond a content library. Access to course content is easy to come by, but don't forget the essential wrap-around components that take foundational knowledge and turn it into real opportunity for skill building.**
- **Whatever approach you take, incorporate ongoing opportunities for feedback and coaching.**

## SHIFT 3: FROM GENERALIZED, CLOSED ACCESS TO PERSONALIZED, INTEGRATED ACCESS

The Learning Management System (LMS) has served its purpose over the last twenty years, but it was created for a different time. According to eLearning Industry:



In the two decades during which the LMS was the dominant paradigm of learning systems, powerful forces—including globalization, free-market liberalism, the development of the internet, the rise of contingent workers, and the innovations in consumer electronics—have changed the world of work profoundly, putting pressure on the default capabilities of the classic LMS.<sup>16</sup>

LMS administration is inherently complex and highly controlled, feeding off a system of closed access in which an admin determines exactly what content is available to whom

and when. This can be an arduous process, without even considering the time it takes to create and maintain formal eLearning courses. The traditional LMS plus eLearning model significantly slows down learning and fails to meet the rate of change within the business.

It's a common story: The technology fails to mimic, let alone improve, people's actual experience of learning in the workplace. Supervisors and admins in particular may feel frustrated by learning technology that requires a lot of maintenance and administration on their part.

There is a timely need to move away from the generalized, closed model of the LMS to a model that encourages personalized, integrated access for all learners. Effective workplace learning must extend beyond a library of content and engage learners in experience-building opportunities. The LMS should connect knowledge acquisition to practice and skill-building opportunities.



### BOTTOM LINE:

**We believe learning technology must evolve to seamlessly facilitate self-directed learning, knowledge sharing, and skill building driven by the employee and supported by L&D, managers, and the business.**

Here are the most important factors contributing to this shift:

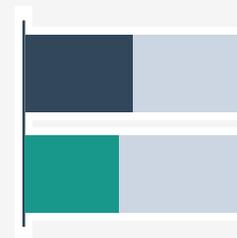
- More contingent and/or flexible workers increases the need for rapid, open access to information in the flow of work.<sup>17</sup>
- Younger generations have a greater desire to self-direct and choose the pace and path of their own learning.<sup>18</sup>
- Technology users expect personalized experiences like they receive through targeted advertising, social media, and music/ shopping recommendations from sites like Amazon and Spotify.<sup>19</sup>
- Upskilling and reskilling require shared knowledge and quality user-generated content available at the time of need, created by people who understand the job at the ground level.<sup>20</sup>
- The workforce wants more learning aligned to their skills gaps.<sup>21</sup>



**OF YOUNG WORKERS ARE LIKELY TO CHANGE COMPANIES BECAUSE THEY AREN'T GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND ADVANCE AS QUICKLY AS THEY'D LIKE<sup>18</sup>**



**OF GEN Z RESPONDENTS SAY THE TECHNOLOGY OFFERED BY AN EMPLOYER WOULD INFLUENCE THEIR JOB CHOICE<sup>19</sup>**



**48% OF RESPONDENTS WANT ASSESSMENTS TO FIND OUT WHERE THEY NEED TO IMPROVE, AND 42% WANT OPPORTUNITIES TO APPLY WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED<sup>21</sup>**

One way to do this is by evolving the LMS to mimic the technology users expect in their daily lives. Content can be provided by anyone, integrated into other systems for just-in-time learning, and organized into smart channels, learning paths, or playlists by competency or topic area.<sup>22</sup> Content should connect with opportunities to apply knowledge and gain insights into performance and skills gaps.

We believe learning technology must evolve to seamlessly facilitate self-directed learning, knowledge sharing, and skill building driven by the employee and supported by L&D, managers, and the business.

**Discover** how Unboxed is transforming learning and skill-building for teams with Spoke.



## HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION:

- **Connect your learning platform with other tools learners use in their day-to-day jobs to support learning in the flow of work.**
- **Curate learning content to deliver a simple, modern learner experience, providing just what learners need, when they need it. Scale effectively by leveraging a learning platform designed for this.**
- **Fuel productivity and continuous skill-building by integrating content delivery and simulation flows into your learning platform.**
- **Leverage AI-coaching feedback to provide measurable, ongoing support and insights into skills strengths and opportunities.**

## SHIFT 4: SHIFT FROM TRAINING CONTENT TO LEARNING EXPERIENCES

With the rise in content marketplaces such as LinkedIn Learning, there is more digital training content available today than ever before. The eLearning industry has grown a staggering 900% since 2000.<sup>23</sup>

But a higher volume of content doesn't necessarily equate to better quality or increased effectiveness. In fact, extremely high volumes of content can create a sense of confusion and overwhelm for learners and learning professionals alike. 66% of learning professionals say they are 'very to extremely concerned' with the challenge of finding, delivering, and tracking content.<sup>24</sup> Good content can be devalued if it's buried among thousands of courses on the same topic.

To be clear, the need for good content is never going away, but the expectations of what makes for optimal learning is changing. The ubiquity of high-quality content and user experiences in daily life has increased the demand for high-quality content and user experiences in the workplace. But what exactly makes for effective workplace learning experiences?



ARE 'VERY TO EXTREMELY CONCERNED' WITH THE CHALLENGE OF FINDING, DELIVERING, AND TRACKING CONTENT

### THE SHIFT FROM TRAINING CONTENT TO LEARNING EXPERIENCES IS TWO-FOLD:

1

A call for a return to tried and true, data-supported instructional techniques that have been unintentionally diminished with the frenzied focus on eLearning and microlearning.



2

A push for new fit-for-purpose methods to acquire and share knowledge beyond traditional approaches.





## BOTTOM LINE:

In a world saturated with content, we believe there must be a renewed focus on surfacing, building, and curating learning experiences with maximum impact.

**1** In terms of the return to data-supported instructional techniques, workforce learning must borrow and adapt the way formal education consistently crafts successful learning experiences<sup>25</sup>:

- Shift away from instructor focus and toward learner focus (less “sage on the stage” and more “guide on the side”).
- Tie content to competencies and skills and break learning down into achievable tasks.
- Include time for self-assessment, practice, action learning, hands-on immersion, and reflection to strengthen retention and drive knowledge transfer.
- Incorporate group-based work, peer sharing, and mentorship.
- Evaluate progress along the way through low-stakes (formative) assessments.
- Create a safe learning environment for practice and making mistakes.

**2** In terms of the push for new methods, there is a need to emphasize context and emotion when building learning experiences.<sup>26</sup> How will it really feel to learn this skill? How will it contribute to the organization's community and help learners build relationships? How will it help learners achieve their career goals?

There is also a need to ensure the right conditions for learning are in place inside the ecosystem and that the culture supports and rewards learning. This means not just providing your employees timely access to the right information, but also providing the right conditions under which they can process this information effectively.<sup>27</sup> This is especially important when you consider, although access to information has increased significantly over the past 20 years, productivity has not followed suit.<sup>28</sup> Organizations must figure out how to cut through the noise and demands on employees' attention in order for learning to thrive. According to Josh Bersin research,



Companies that embrace a learning culture can adapt, reorganize, move into new product areas, and grow in a much more sustainable way.<sup>29</sup>

In a world saturated with content, we believe there must be a renewed focus on surfacing, building, and curating learning experiences with maximum impact.



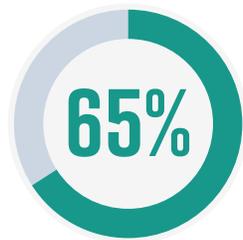
## HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION:

- **Tie content to competencies and skills and break learning down into achievable tasks.**
- **Include time for self-assessment, practice, action learning, hands-on immersion, and reflection to strengthen retention and drive knowledge transfer.**
- **Incorporate group-based work, peer sharing, and mentorship.**
- **Emphasize context (why it matters for learners and for the organization) and emotion (how it will feel) when building learning experiences.**
- **Create a safe learning environment for practice and making mistakes and that the culture supports and rewards learning.**

## SHIFT 5: SHIFT FROM LIMITED METRICS TO HOLISTIC MEASUREMENT

The Kirkpatrick model of measurement has been around for more than 50 years, and a handful of other measurement models have emerged over that time, many attempting to expand on Kirkpatrick and address some of its limitations. What these models have in common is that they are attempting, by some method, to measure learning outcomes—that is, impact of training to performance and to the business (Kirkpatrick Level 4).<sup>30</sup>

The reality is the majority of organizations (65%) have not been able to move from measuring output to measuring outcomes,<sup>31</sup> and only 24% of L&D professionals are even measuring basic metrics like learner engagement.<sup>32</sup> Though organizations are struggling to accomplish effective measurement, the shifts in the workforce necessitate accelerating these efforts, and 96% of learning professionals say they want to do it.<sup>33</sup>



**OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MOVE FROM MEASURING OUTPUT TO MEASURING OUTCOMES<sup>31</sup>**

**L&D PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE CURRENTLY MEASURING BASIC METRICS LIKE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT<sup>32</sup>**



### **BOTTOM LINE:**

**Organizations must move toward a more holistic approach to measurement that reveals insights into ongoing learning, skill building, and on-the-job performance over time, propelled by iterative coaching and feedback.**

The type of learning we need demands a renewed focus on and new approach to metrics. Tracking training completions without business impact is no longer enough when workers are motivated by learning opportunities and learning is increasingly fragmented and abundant. These factors are exacerbated when the jobs of the future require significant upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.<sup>34</sup>

Good quality data is critical to measuring impact and to designing better learning experiences and coaching. According to learning expert JD Dillon,



L&D must expand the definition of “learning data” to include more than test scores, smile sheets and course tracking. These data points are still needed, but L&D must be able to assess an employee’s current capability, regardless of the training they completed in the past. This will help L&D proactively design and implement right-fit, persistent solutions before performance gaps appear.<sup>35</sup>

We believe organizations must move toward a more holistic approach to measurement that reveals insights into ongoing knowledge acquisition, skill building, and on-the-job performance over time, propelled by iterative coaching and feedback.



## HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION:

- **Assess how you’re doing today. Most organizations have clear strengths and opportunities to build from.**
- **Identify the learning data you’ll collect in order to address your opportunities.**
- **Start gathering data. Select a pilot initiative or program to test how you might gather and analyze data. Keep iterating on your approach as you go, and then create a plan to scale.**
- **Forge partnerships with IT, HR, and other groups in the business who can open up access to relevant data that already exists.**

# Conclusion

## MOVING AHEAD WITH COURAGE

2020 reinforced how difficult it is to predict unexpected impacts to the workforce and the economy at large. As a learning professional, it's important to continue moving ahead with courage. With so much shifting in the workforce, L&D has a more captive audience than we've had in a long time. Now is the time your colleagues are looking for support and guidance about how to adapt, upskill, and evolve your learning culture to meet the new demands on your workforce.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

If you're feeling stuck figuring out how to get started responding to these shifts, **reach out** to schedule your free consultation today.



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# About Unboxed

Unboxed partners with our clients to provide learning experiences, technology, and expertise to help achieve continuous learning and cultivate Skill Agility™, enabling the workforce of the future.

Organizations are challenged by the changing pace of business and need new skills to effectively meet business goals. We use dynamic learning experiences, custom and turnkey content, and technology to help leaders shift their mindsets, embrace continuous learning, and make skill building a constant for themselves and their teams.

These evolved learning experiences arise from our client-focused approach and expertise in identifying critical skills, curating content and data, and developing engaging, learner-focused curriculum strategies and technology. From vision to launch, Unboxed helps enable the workforce of the future. Our approach is different—get ready to Think Outside™.

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