

D2L



Navigating Change

Supporting the Workforce of Tomorrow
Through Specialized Employee Training

Introduction

The corporate world has been through a whirlwind of change, especially in the past year. Not only do businesses need to compete and thrive in an ever more globalized world, but external factors like health crises, social unrest, and environmental emergencies also have made many businesses rethink how they work and operate.

While in the past companies were used to hiring from a local talent pool, the rise in remote work has meant that businesses today are competing on a global scale to attract and retain staff. This not only puts pressure on human resources to offer a standout workplace, but it also tests the company's existing culture, processes, and tools to support and engage a distributed workforce.

Add to this the rapid pace of technological innovation and rising competition across all industries and it becomes clear that businesses can no longer afford to operate the same way they did only a few years ago. Indeed, the past year has seen businesses speed up their digitization efforts by three to four years to modernize their operations.

These shifts have put pressure on business executives and human resources departments to rethink how they hire and train their staff. Employees today have to work, collaborate, and communicate in vastly different contexts. Millions had to transition to a work-from-home routine and take on brand-new responsibilities that require different skills altogether.

The aftermath of the pandemic has highlighted that investing in human capital development is paramount for safeguarding business continuity. The World Economic Forum estimates that 44% of the skills employees have today will need to change by 2025 if they're to stay competitive. That's a massive gap that employers need to recognize and prepare for.

In this report, we'll look at **some of the major challenges that businesses are facing today and why addressing them is important for business success**, as well as **what companies can do to prepare for the future**.

Responding to Evolving Skills Needs

The need for re-skilling the existing talent has never been higher. The rapid pace of digital transformation across all industries, as well as the disruptive nature of unforeseen social, economic, and environmental challenges, has left many businesses to rethink how they hire and train their workforce.

Indeed, **58%** of employees would need new skills post COVID-19 in order to do their jobs, and **40%** report that they already have to complete tasks outside of their job roles. This increased need for upskilling has put into question many of the existing talent development practices around how training is defined and implemented.

A Shift from Job to Competency-Based Training

As traditional job roles change or disappear and new cross-functional roles become the norm, legacy approaches to developing training plans are not only becoming increasingly ineffective, but they can also actively hurt the business's bottom line. In fact, **80%** of the workforce and 77% of senior leaders report feeling unprepared for the future.

Forward-thinking businesses need to abandon what they thought they knew about talent development and adopt a brand-new perspective. Hiring new staff to plug a skills gap within the organization is not only a short-term fix, but it's also becoming increasingly unaffordable. The Society for Human Resource Development (SHRM) has found that the average cost per hire for businesses today amounts to **\$4,425**. Add to this the time needed for onboarding new employees (it can often take months before an employee becomes fully productive) and the cost of talent acquisition can easily skyrocket into the five-figure domain.



Instead, the current environment presents the perfect opportunity for businesses to rethink their business needs and see how they can maximize the value they get out of their existing workforce. One approach is to think beyond the job-specific skills paradigm and allow employees to be matched cross-functionally to projects they already have the skills for. Cisco, for instance, has introduced an internal **“talent marketplace”** to mimic the gig economy and allow employees to use and develop their various skills beyond their job roles. This transpires across all of the organization's career development, where a single job role isn't linked to a single career pathway and can evolve in many different directions.

Another approach is to look at training as a holistic organizational process rather than an isolated business function. **Instead of developing rigid training plans founded on outdated data, businesses need to look at the emerging skills landscape and develop competency-based development plans that respond to existing and anticipated changes in the market.** In order to do this, organizations need to constantly reevaluate their own business strategy, review the core and adjacent skills their current workforce possesses, and fill the identified gaps through specialized employee training programs.

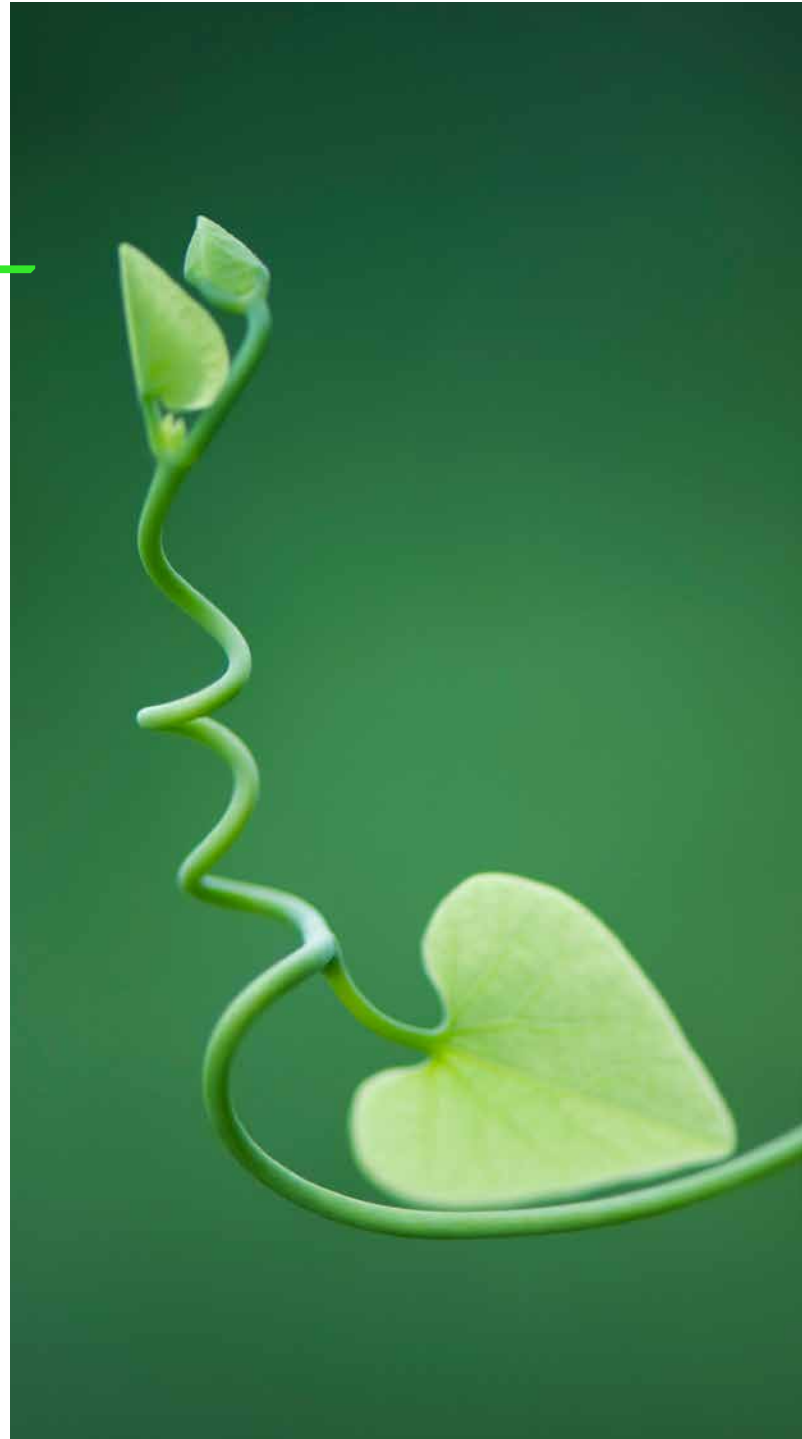
Managing Business Growth

While continuous business growth is the single most important measure of business success, many companies are taken aback by all the challenges sudden growth can bring to an organization. From hiring and onboarding the right staff at the right time to timely adjustment and implementation of new processes and workflows, business growth can really test the limits of any company.

The past year has seen many businesses put a break on their expansion plans, whether due to a direct impact of the pandemic or as a precautionary measure. However, the vast push for worldwide vaccination programs has meant that many industries are returning to normal and even reporting growth. In fact, [OECD reports](#) that many of the advanced economies have either recovered or are expected to recover to their pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2021.

As people's reservations ease up, many businesses are seeing an upward movement in business activity and are gearing up for growth. This requires businesses to remain agile and really think about how

they hire, onboard, and train their growing staff in the new business landscape.





Training Needs to Be Scalable and Personalized

One great challenge businesses face is the scaling of their hiring and training processes in the context of remote and hybrid work without sacrificing quality. The pandemic has already spurred a massive shift from face-to-face to virtual learning. However, keeping learning aligned with evolving business needs can be difficult.

An important factor in this process is not only to propagate the training at scale regardless of the physical location of the employee, but also to adapt the learning to the individual learner's needs. No two employees doing the same job would have the exact same skill level, and the learning program needs to reflect that. In the digital world, this can be achieved through incorporating adaptive learning technologies, branched learning, and online collaboration that encourages learners to share experiences and learn from one another.

Training Needs to Nurture Employee Agility

Another business challenge that is more elusive and difficult to tackle is preparing the workforce for the unknown. Business processes and tools are changing daily in order to drive growth.

Staff needs to not only be trained on specific tools and processes, but to also have certain agility needs embedded within their modus operandi to help them quickly and easily respond to an unforeseen change in circumstances.

Indeed, 70% of change programs fail to achieve their goals mainly due to employee resistance and poor support from management. Yet programs where employees feel invested in the change have a 30% higher chance of being successful.

One way to respond to this challenge is for leaders to clearly communicate the evolution of business needs and how specific changes affect employees' work. In fact, the resistance to change can be a productive process to identify weaknesses and involve staff so that they feel like they're a driving force behind the change rather than passive onlookers. Developing a training program that actively addresses change management and takes employees through business change scenarios before they happen can be an excellent foundation for building an agile workforce

Managing a Distributed Workforce

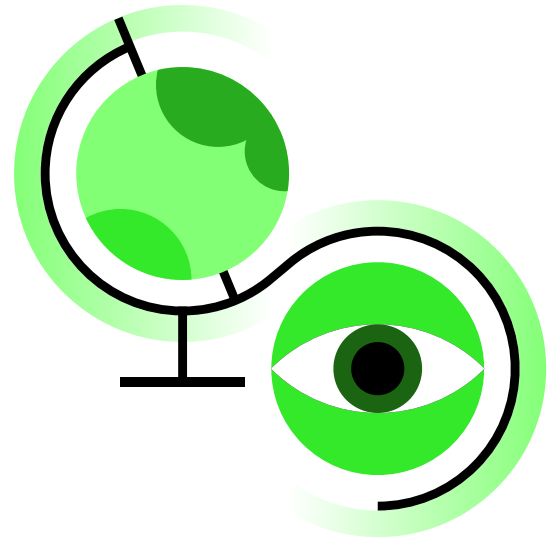
The past year has seen a massive rise in remote work. Employees around the world rushed to create makeshift home offices while companies hurried to adjust their infrastructure and security policies to respond to this shift. This unintended experiment in working styles has challenged many preconceptions about remote work and has introduced a long-lasting change in people's views toward presenteeism and the need for the office.

In fact, a study by PwC shows that working from home has had a positive impact on people's productivity, and 55% of employees prefer to keep working remotely at least three days a week. Some industries, of course, are better suited than others for this type of work. Finance, management, and professional services, in particular, can benefit from the new trend, with a study showing that employees in these sectors can work remotely 62%–76% of the time with no loss in productivity.

Promoting a Sense of Belonging

Businesses today are feeling added pressure to make sure not only that their workforces have the necessary skills to compete in a global market, but also that training can be accessible and available to all employees and that people feel part of the company culture. In the past year, only 32% of new hires felt a sense of belonging to their organization.

While employee productivity has gone up in the past year, people's anxieties and feelings of burnout have also increased. The main culprit for this has been the lack of clear communication from employers about their future plans and policies. McKinsey reports that employees who feel included and informed on key business decisions are five times more likely to report improvements in well-being and productivity. Even if certain aspects of the business are still unclear, regular and ongoing communication can still have a positive impact on keeping employees engaged and motivated.



Managing Security and IT Compliance

There are other, more practical, challenges that come with a hybrid workplace. One very obvious one is keeping businesses secure and compliant in how they handle sensitive data and use technology. In many of these cases, business change needs to be closely followed by timely employee training. For instance, introducing a new workflow or software across the business needs to be quickly communicated across the workforce and managers need to make sure employees are familiar with it.

Aligning Employee Training to Organizational Needs

As business demands change, so does the need for employee training. Employees today need to have a good grasp of not only their core job skills, but also any other adjacent skills necessary in the modern workplace, such as cybersecurity, digital communication, and digital savviness. Leaders also need to be prepared to lead, track, and inspire a remote workforce with very little to no in-person interaction. This requires a completely different approach to delivering and measuring employee training.

Despite the unanimous agreement that corporate training is essential to supporting business growth, it's also one of the most difficult things to measure in terms of its impact on the business's bottom line. Often this is because of a clear discrepancy between how work performance and training outcomes are measured. While an employee might have successfully completed a course, the lack of a clear link to how this new knowledge translates into their day-to-day work makes measuring training efficacy very difficult.

Another factor is the lack of clarity between where the business is going and the skills gap in the current workforce. The accelerating cadence of business change often leaves learning and development departments lagging in their ability to translate this change into new competency training.

Last but not least, many of the skills employees need to thrive are intangible. Soft skills, while crucial, can be difficult to measure as they are applied across all aspects of the business, and it can be difficult to capture the difference they've made in closing a sales deal or finishing a project on time.



Specialized Employee Training

The New Landscape of Corporate Learning
Many of the challenges outlined here are neither new nor surprising. Yet many have come into focus as businesses prepare for the future. Budget cuts and market uncertainty have meant that many organizations had to work with reduced staff to face and respond to unprecedented challenges.

This has emphasized the need for specialized employee training as opposed to stand-alone training programs that are delivered in a silo without a clear link to the overall strategy of the business. In this context, specialized employee training refers to the use of data to map competencies to specific job roles that, in turn, respond directly to the long-term strategy of the business.

Some of the main benefits and characteristics of specialized employee training are: It's grounded in a real business need. It's continuous with timely updates and iterations as the business changes and evolves. It's measurable and its outcomes can be directly linked to business performance. It's personalized and holistic, covering a range of skills and competencies in months as opposed to days or weeks.

That said, individual courses and bite-size learning still have a place in the corporate world. Whether a business goes for specialized employee training or opts for a single course depends on what it's trying to achieve and, ultimately, its budget.

SCENARIO	TRAINING APPROACH
Train employees on how to use a new piece of software.	Self-paced e-learning course or a single instructional video.
Close a skills gap—train the engineering team on new approaches to agile software development.	Online or blended learning course consisting of several modules.
Sell to Fortune 500 companies to meet growth projections. The company needs to train its sales team on enterprise selling, its product team on what enterprise clients are looking for, and marketing on the new competitive landscape.	Specialized employee training where individual competencies are identified and incorporated in the training program in a tangible and measurable way.

Here, training employees on an individual piece of software or agile software development can also be part of a wider specialized training strategy. However, these courses need to be designed and implemented in a way that is measurable and linked to a wider business goal.

How to Implement Specialized Employee Training

While specialized employee training can be one of the best ways to align corporate training to corporate needs, businesses might wonder where to start if they've never delivered training in this manner before.

Here are some things businesses need to consider in order to implement a successful specialized employee training program:

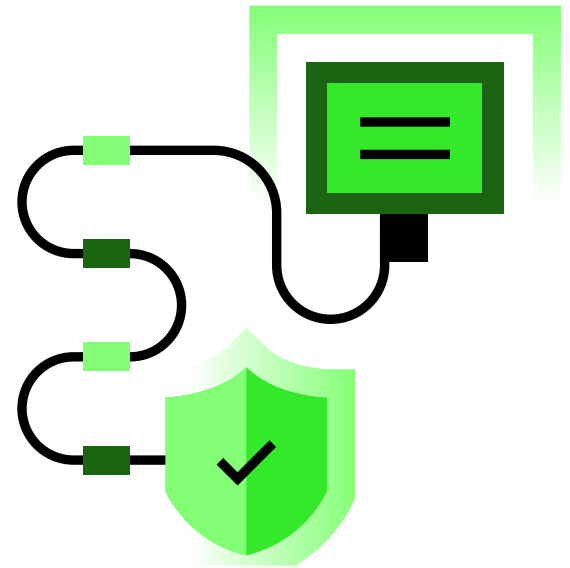
1. Define a business strategy and identify immediate, short-term, and long-term business needs.
2. Translate business needs into core skills and competencies across the business. Identify job roles that are out of date or any new job roles that need to be introduced within the organization.
3. Identify key metrics per competency.
4. Perform assessments prior to training to determine baseline skill level.
5. Review the training approaches that are most suitable for addressing individual competency while tracking learner performance.
6. Address individual skills gaps in employees via adaptive personalized learning and additional tutor support.
7. Administer competency-based assessments related to specific business needs.
8. Perform skills assessment and job performance reviews three and six months after the completion of training.



Elements of Specialized Employee Training Programs

The world of corporate training has changed drastically in the past decade with the emergence of new technologies and instructional approaches. While specialized employee training is designed to respond directly to business needs, how, when, and where the training is delivered depends on the unique circumstances of each organization.

Here, we look at the business challenges outlined above and how a specialized employee training program could respond to each one.



Responding to Evolving Skills Needs

NEED	SOLUTION	SPECIALIZED EMPLOYEE TRAINING
Employee skills are rapidly becoming outdated. Rapid employee upskilling is an ongoing business need.	Deliver immersive training that encourages high knowledge retention and allows employees to practice what they've learned.	Use learning modules with video assignments and interactive elements followed by assessments and personalized feedback.
Business problems transcend individual job roles. Employees need to have a diverse skill set beyond their individual roles.	Employees can access mandatory and optional training programs that can hone their adjacent skills and interests.	Deliver badges and certificates that showcase employees' diverse skill sets. Keep a repository of employee skills and achievements to match staff to new projects.
Businesses have to anticipate the skills their workforce would need in the future.	Training serves as a bridge between emerging industry trends and the long-term goals of the business.	Learning modules are easy to iterate on and update within a scalable platform. Content and courses can easily be shuffled and updated to respond to changing needs.

Managing Business Growth

NEED	SOLUTION	SPECIALIZED EMPLOYEE TRAINING
Scale employee training without sacrificing quality.	Predefined onboarding programs that are easy to update, personalize, and access on the go.	A mobile-friendly learning environment with clear milestones and achievements defined is wise.
Embed employee agility and adaptability within the organizational culture to facilitate change management.	Future-proof the business through a resilient and innovative workforce.	Gamified learning modules that encourage employees to come up with their own solutions to real-life business problems should be implemented.
Address employee-specific skills gap to maximize productivity.	Provide personalized training and promote peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher collaborative learning.	Use a centralized platform that supports adaptive technologies and comes with synchronous and asynchronous collaboration functionality that enables one-to-one and one-to-many communication.



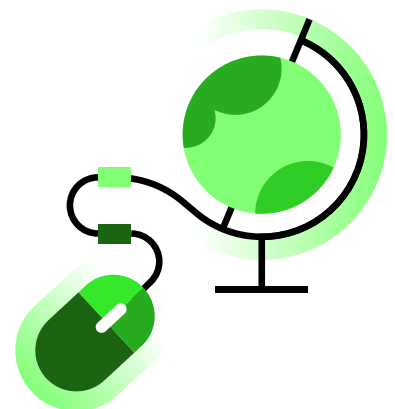
Managing Distributed Workforce

NEED	SOLUTION	SPECIALIZED EMPLOYEE TRAINING
Promote a sense of belonging among existing and new hires.	Practice ongoing communication with employees to keep them abreast of business changes.	A centralized tool with live updates and news feed accessible to all employees should be adopted.
Reduce employee anxiety and detachment.	Deliver ongoing values and company culture training as well as on-demand personalized support.	Engaging learning modules grounded in real-life examples of how the business operates and where it's going are needed. Functionality that supports mentoring and personal development plans for staff is called for.
Keep business processes and data secure and compliant with global security standards.	Document changes in processes and workflows and keep transparent communication across the business.	Send alerts to staff when new content is available with assigned deadlines for completion. Keep content up to date and receive notifications when an employee is at risk of missing his or her compliance training deadline.

Conclusion

Advances in technology and shifts in global market trends mean that businesses today have to innovate at a much faster rate than ever before. Simply put, their ability to remove inefficiencies while keeping the workforce knowledgeable, engaged, and productive can mean the difference between success and failure.






In this context, organizations have to rethink how they design and deliver their learning and development strategies. Specialized employee training can transform a business and give organizations the edge they need against their competition. Not only would well-designed programs help companies reduce employee churn and improve overall business performance, but they can also help companies future-proof their business by anticipating what skills their workforce would need and delivering these skills in advance.





ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalized learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology products—D2L Brightspace and D2L Wave—enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world. Learn more at [D2L.com](https://www.d2l.com).

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