INTREPID™

LEARNING AT WORK, TOGETHER.

Collaborative Learning

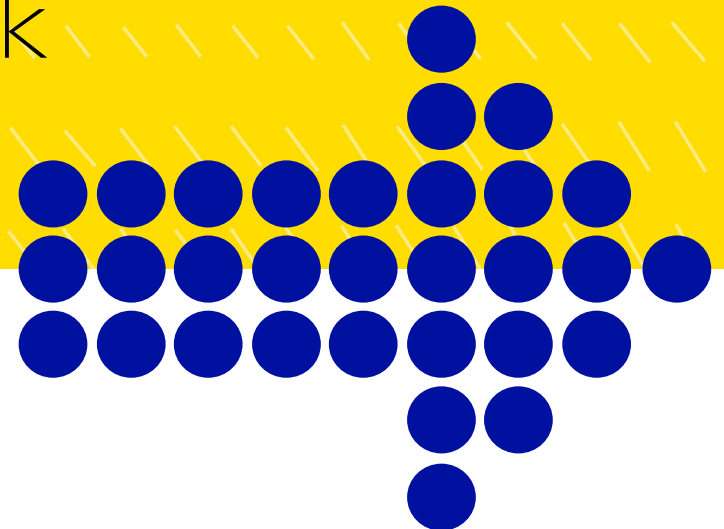The Key to Better Performance
in a Hybrid World of Work

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Introduction

By definition, collaborative learning is the process in which two or more employees learn together on their own or in a larger group setting. It is an active learning approach that promotes learners being engaged and interacting with each other, rather than the typically passive absorption of information through eLearning or lectures. A collaborative approach can be seen in both cohort-based learning, where employees train together over a period of time, and ad hoc team-based or project-based training. As we know from research on where employees feel they learn[1], much of workplace learning happens through direct interaction with others. Furthermore, collaborative learning is highly valued by learning professionals, as 86% believe learning is more engaging when people learn together, 91% say employees who learn together are more successful and 92% feel that learning together creates a sense of belonging[2].

But in today's digitally ubiquitous online workplace, are your learners actually working together to make things happen, or are they isolated? Are your learners forging communities and challenging one another, or are they siloed and failing to share insights with peers? Do your employees have learning experiences enriched by people from different backgrounds adding their perspectives, or are they stuck absorbing content from a single source? In short, to what extent is your organization's learning truly collaborative?

[1] Training Industry, Inc. (2022). Updating 70-20-10 for the 21st century. Retrieved from trainingindustry.com.
[2] LinkedIn (2021). Workplace learning report: Skill building in the new world of work. Retrieved from learning.linkedin.com.

To answer these questions, Intrepid and Training Industry teamed up for a research survey in which we asked 353 training managers and decision-makers about how their learners interact. As part of the data we collected, we also compiled indicators of how organizations perform based on market share, profitability and revenue growth. High-performing organizations (HPOs), defined, are organizations that scored above the 75th percentile on a composite of these indicators; low-performing organizations (LPOs) fell below the 25th percentile on the same composite. By contrasting HPOs with LPOs, we're able to highlight differences in how these organizations tend to approach their employee training. In this report, we will discuss the connection between high-performing companies and the degree to which they practice collaborative learning as a component of their training strategy.
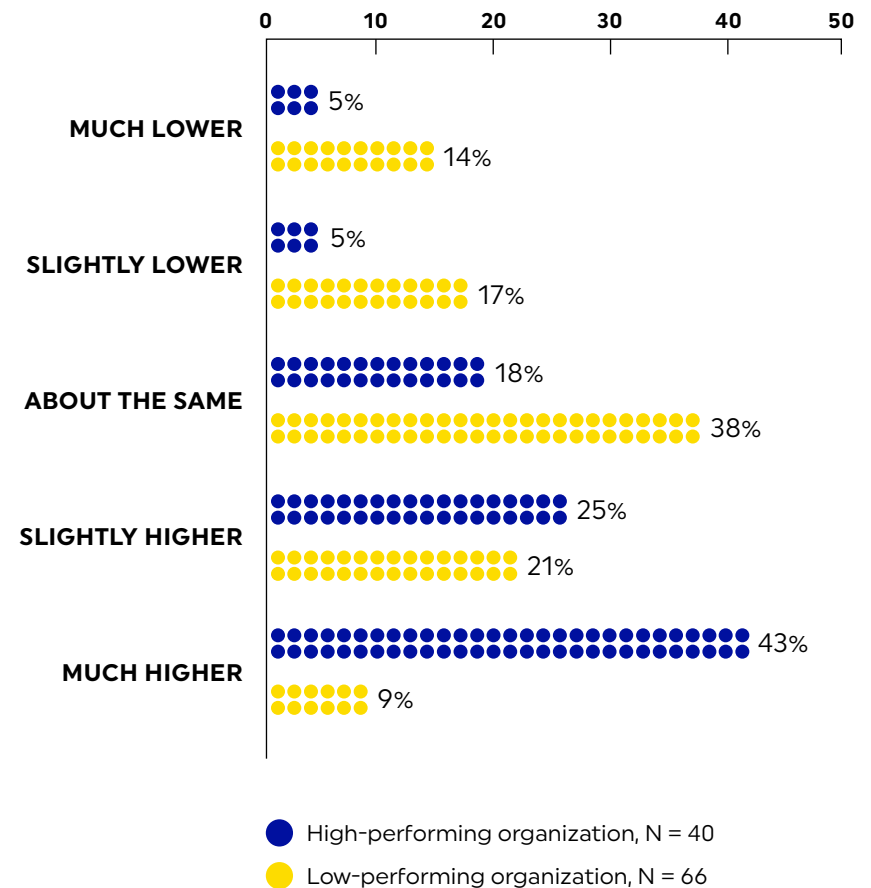
Collaboration and Organizational Performance

First, we wanted to get a feel for what organizations have been doing with collaborative learning. Is it on the rise, or has it reached a peak from which it is receding? So, we asked respondents how much collaboration is included in their employee training now compared to the past one to two years. On average, nearly half of companies (49%) are offering more collaborative learning than in the recent past.

Now, let's spoil the headline right off the bat: High-performing organizations (HPOs) use collaborative learning for more of their learning offerings compared to low-performing organizations (LPOs). Let's explain what that means and how it illustrates what collaborative learning can do for organizations.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of HPOs (68%) are using more collaborative learning whereas LPOs tend to be holding steady. So, the implication here is not that LPOs are shunning the use of collaboration in their training programs. But calculating odds ratios from our data shows that HPOs are 5.5 times more likely to be increasing the use of collaborative learning compared to LPOs.

½ **of companies are offering more collaborative learning.**

HPOs have increased collaborative learning 5.5x compared to LPOs.

FIGURE 1.

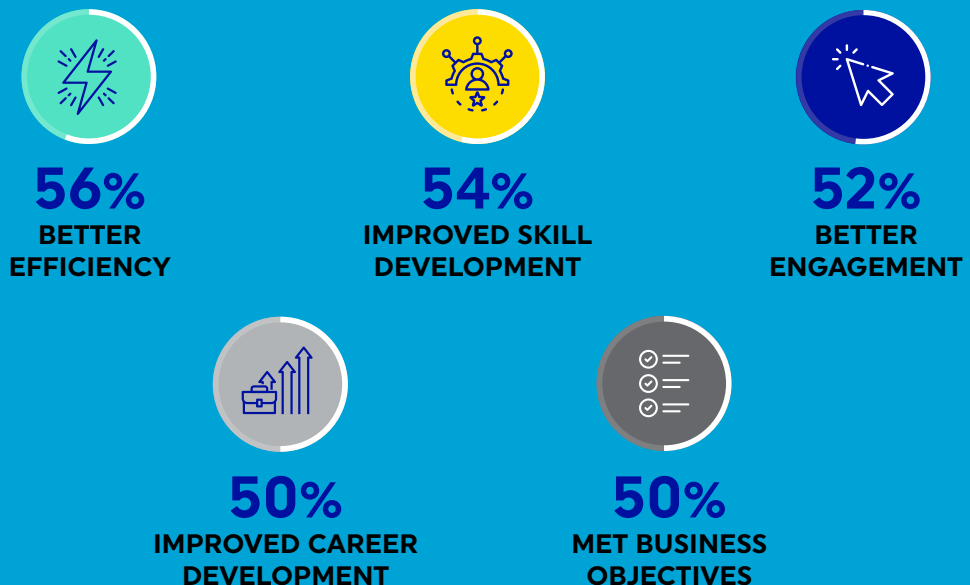## Change in Amount of Collaborative Learning in the Past 1-2 Years

MUCH LOWER — 5% / 14%

SLIGHTLY LOWER — 5% / 17%

ABOUT THE SAME — 18% / 38%

SLIGHTLY HIGHER — 25% / 21%

MUCH HIGHER — 43% / 9%

● High-performing organization, N = 40
● Low-performing organization, N = 66

FIGURE 2.

Impact of Collaborative Learning on Business Outcomes

56%
BETTER EFFICIENCY

54%
IMPROVED SKILL DEVELOPMENT

52%
BETTER ENGAGEMENT

50%
IMPROVED CAREER DEVELOPMENT

50%
MET BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

"
Everyone helps each other learn, and the work efficiency is improved significantly."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, MANUFACTURING

"
Employees are more willing [to learn] when it's a group or collaborative effort."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, MANUFACTURING

"
We are starting to see the results from offering collaborative learning and are increasing sessions where employees can work and learn from each other. It's made our workforce happier, productive and confident in their jobs."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, BUSINESS SERVICES/CONSULTING

Generally speaking, collaboration is seen as beneficial to the majority of learning efforts — few would disagree. But what, exactly, is the benefit that can be reaped from sowing collaborative opportunities into employee training? As shown in Figure 2, at least half of the companies in our survey indicated that they see collaborative learning contributing to a variety of desirable business outcomes to a large extent, including:

- » Better efficiency
- » Improved skill development
- » Better engagement
- » Improved career development
- » Met business objectives

Again, when we looked deeper into the data to calculate odds ratios, we found that HPOs are 4.9 times more likely to see these positive outcomes from collaborative learning compared to LPOs. In other words, not only are HPOs increasing their use of collaboration in training, but these organizations also see more tangible impacts from leaning into this particular approach to employee learning.

HPOs are 4.9x more likely to see positive business outcomes from collaborative learning than LPOs.

The breadth of what collaborative learning can accomplish goes beyond enterprise-level outcomes, however, and includes benefits for individual learners. To explore this, our survey asked whether organizations felt that training which includes collaborative opportunities held value for individuals. As seen in Figure 3, there was strong agreement that the interactions between peers within learning experiences holds constructive merit beyond the business outcomes listed in Figure 2. In short, both organizations and individual learners benefit strongly from collaborative learning and more organizations — and HPOs in particular — have been increasing their use of collaborative learning in recent years.

Now that we've explored the benefits of collaboration in organizational performance, let's take a look at a real-life example that exemplifies the power of collaborative learning.

FIGURE 3.

Agreement Levels With Benefits of Collaborative Learning

78%
GAIN NEW SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE FROM PEERS

76%
DEVELOP PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS THROUGH COLLABORATION

72%
ACTIVELY EXCHANGE IDEAS WITH PEERS

"
[Our company is] very open to this style of learning. We cover more because everyone can help each other."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, CONSTRUCTION

"
We branch out a lot and work with new groups to learn and expand knowledge."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, NONPROFIT

"
The best kind of work is teamwork. We truly believe that team training is much more effective than solo."

L&D PROFESSIONAL, MANUFACTURING

The Power of Collaborative Learning: A Real-Life Example

ServiceNow, a leading enterprise software company, recognized the importance of upskilling technical architects to meet market demands. To achieve this, they partnered with Intrepid to launch their Certified Technical Architect (CTA) program, a globally distributed initiative. This use case showcases how ServiceNow leveraged collaborative learning to enhance participant skills, achieve remarkable business outcomes, and exceed expectations. Let's explore the key details of this award-winning program.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

ServiceNow faced challenges in scaling and enhancing its CTA program, including program administrator burnout and attrition risks due to considerable manual work, limited functionality of existing tools, and a fragmented user experience.

SOLUTION

ServiceNow partnered with Intrepid for a 12-week CTA program, combining live virtual sessions, self-paced learning, individual and group assignments, quizzes, and a capstone project. Cohorts of 60 global learners were supported by managers, trainers, and each other for rich collaboration.

RESULTS

The redesigned CTA program delivered on the Intrepid platform achieved remarkable success. ServiceNow increased program scalability and velocity, with cohorts expanding **threefold** and new cohorts launching monthly, and the platform automation reduced administrative overhead and improved data and reporting consolidation. Most notably, initial pass rates increased more than 27% and the net promoter score increased nearly 43%.

In the next section, we'll discuss how collaborative learning and virtual modalities are finding intersections in modern workplaces.

27% BETTER PASS RATES
43% BETTER NPS
3X INCREASE COHORT SIZE

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Brandon Hall Group
TECHNOLOGY EXCELLENCE AWARD
GOLD 2022

> **We needed to ensure our Expert Program had a platform that was intuitive and able to provide a strong level of learner engagement through various supported modalities, but also that was streamlined and easy to administer as we scaled globally."**

SHELLIE GRIEVE
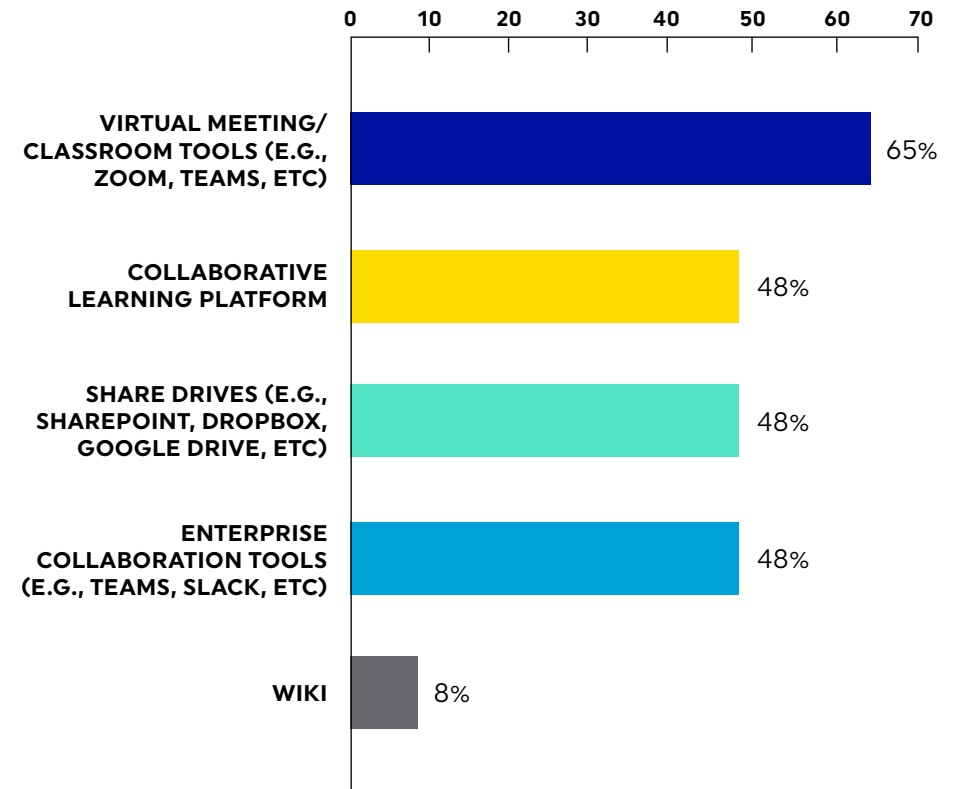DIRECTOR OF COLLABORATIVE
LEARNING, SERVICENOW

Collaboration and Digital Learning

As we noted in the introduction, it's worth examining how collaborative learning functions in organizations today. For example, what tools are they using to foster collaboration, and how many? What challenges and barriers are organizations facing that are keeping some from succeeding with collaborative learning?

To begin with, we asked companies about their technology stack for learning and what tools they currently use that could support interactions between learners (Figure 4). Not surprisingly, the most common technology resources organizations turn to for collaborative learning are the ubiquitous virtual meeting tools (65%), followed closely by specialized collaborative learning platforms, enterprise collaboration tools, and shared drives (48% for each).
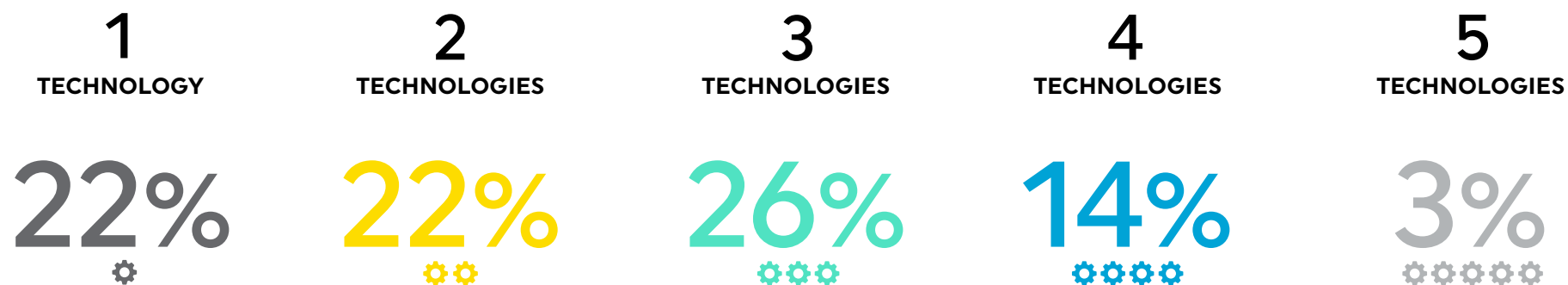
HPOs are 4.4x more likely to have a collaborative learning platform in their tech stack than LPOs.

FIGURE 4.

Types of Learning Technologies Supporting Collaborative Learning

Technology	%
VIRTUAL MEETING/ CLASSROOM TOOLS (E.G., ZOOM, TEAMS, ETC)	65%
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PLATFORM	48%
SHARE DRIVES (E.G., SHAREPOINT, DROPBOX, GOOGLE DRIVE, ETC)	48%
ENTERPRISE COLLABORATION TOOLS (E.G., TEAMS, SLACK, ETC)	48%
WIKI	8%

FIGURE 5.

Total Number of Learning Technologies Supporting Collaborative Learning

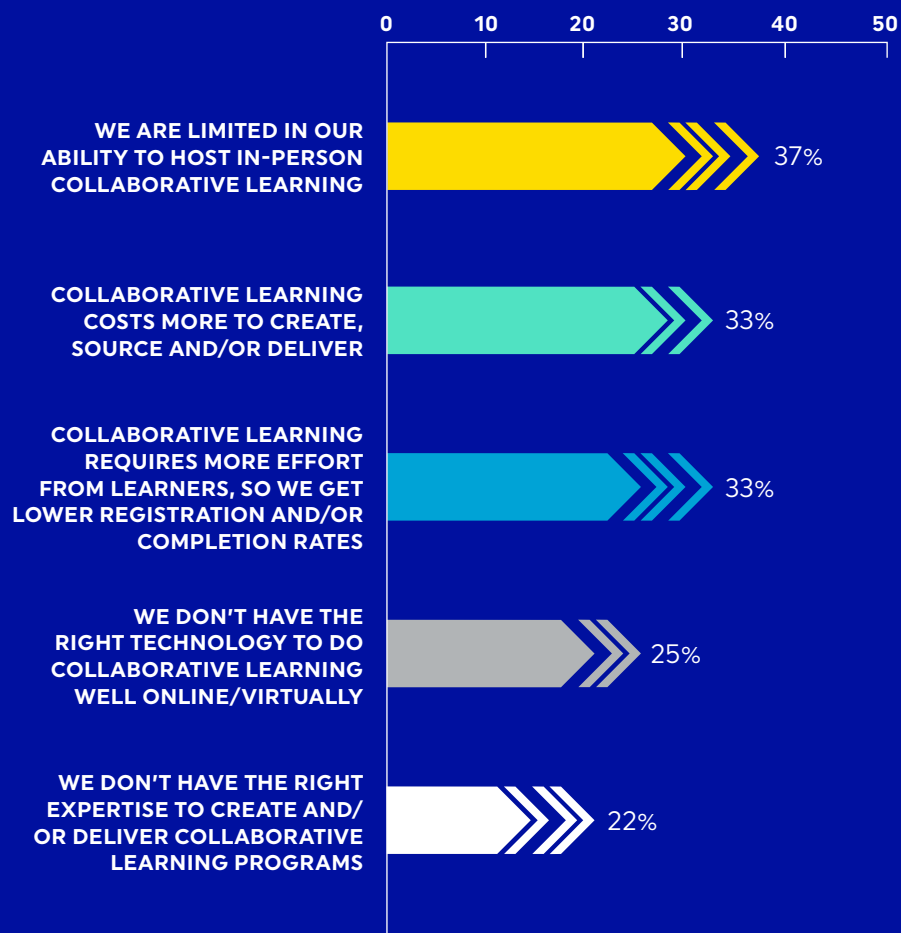| 1	2	3	4	5
TECHNOLOGY	**TECHNOLOGIES**	**TECHNOLOGIES**	**TECHNOLOGIES**	**TECHNOLOGIES**
22%	**22%**	**26%**	**14%**	**3%**

Exploring who is using these collaborative learning tools, our data showed that HPOs were 4.4 times more likely than LPOs to have a specific platform in their stack for collaborative learning. This is a striking finding. HPOs aren't simply telling their L&D functions to cobble together collaborative learning solutions with a motley mix of existing generic technologies — they're making investments in tools that are fit for purpose to design and deliver meaningful collaborative learning experiences.

We found that many companies have multiple technologies in place to enable collaborative learning. As seen in Figure 5, only 22% of companies offer a single tool that enables collaborative learning. Most organizations rely on multiple technologies — on average, 48% of organizations use two to three technologies or tools to support collaborative learning.

48%
of organizations are using 2-3 technologies to support collaborative learning.

FIGURE 6.

Organizational Challenges to Offering Collaborative Learning

WE ARE LIMITED IN OUR ABILITY TO HOST IN-PERSON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING — 37%

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COSTS MORE TO CREATE, SOURCE AND/OR DELIVER — 33%

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING REQUIRES MORE EFFORT FROM LEARNERS, SO WE GET LOWER REGISTRATION AND/OR COMPLETION RATES — 33%

WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY TO DO COLLABORATIVE LEARNING WELL ONLINE/VIRTUALLY — 25%

WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERTISE TO CREATE AND/OR DELIVER COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS — 22%

Still, there are challenges that organizations face when seeking to implement collaborative learning. We asked our respondents about the issues they've experienced, as can be seen in Figure 6. Despite the fundamental shifts in practice and perspective driven by the pandemic, many organizations still see in-person training as the primary, default mode for collaborative learning. Accordingly, the biggest noted drawback to collaborative learning is the ability to host in-person programs (37%), which is often also associated with high costs to create and deliver training, and a greater investment of learner time. On the other hand, it's particularly notable that 25% of companies claim they don't have the technology, and 22% don't have the requisite in-house expertise — so even if these organizations wanted to deliver collaborative learning experiences, they likely need specialized technology and expertise to help them be successful.

Of course, the opportunities for collaborative learning stretch well beyond the limitations of in-person training. The challenges that organizations face with collaborative learning can be overcome (or at least lessened) by finding forms of digital collaboration that capitalize on the current generation of learning technologies, such as collaborative learning platforms. Might a company need to add a new platform to its stack to enable this to happen? Yes, and our data suggests that most organizations already have some other foundation technologies in place to enable them to build and deliver effective collaborative learning experiences.

Takeaways on Collaborative Learning

So, what's an organization to make of all this? The primary takeaway from our data is that collaborative learning positively impacts organizations that deploy it in many ways. As we covered in the first section, HPOs are using collaboration in their training at a much higher rate than LPOs, and this collaborative approach is credited with positively influencing desirable outcomes and driving benefits for both organizations and learners alike. But we also established that collaboration isn't easy, and digital collaboration in particular represents a way of thinking about learners interacting with others in new ways that leverage online learning tools. In the remainder of this section, we'll discuss some suggestions for how organizations can adapt their training practices to include more collaborative learning opportunities.

1. Collaboration must be a strategic priority, it doesn't happen by happy accident.

L&D decision-makers need to purposefully plan for collaborative learning from the outset in order to reap the benefits, rather than bolt it on to existing formats and hope for the best.
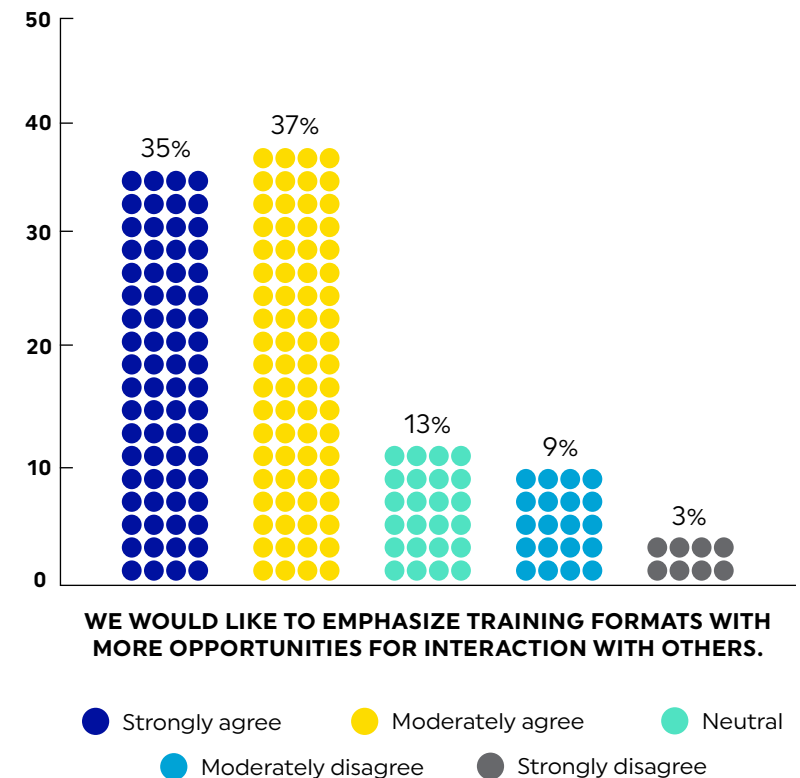
In fact, when we asked organizations about their future training strategy priorities, the top priority we saw was increasing training formats that include collaborative learning. As seen in Figure 7, this was true for approximately 72% of the sample. These results suggest that not only have HPOs been leaning into collaborative learning in recent years, they are committed to that strategy in the future. Accordingly, we found that HPOs were 3.2 times more likely to emphasize collaboration as a part of their future training strategy compared to LPOs.
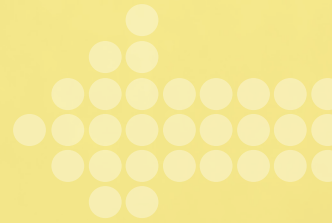
> **HPOs are 3.2x more likely to emphasize collaboration in their future learning strategy than LPOs.**

FIGURE 7.

Emphasis on Learner Interaction as Future Training Strategy

WE WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASIZE TRAINING FORMATS WITH MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION WITH OTHERS.

- Strongly agree — 35%
- Moderately agree — 37%
- Neutral — 13%
- Moderately disagree — 9%
- Strongly disagree — 3%

2. Being an HPO means being on board with collaborative learning.

We can't stress it enough: The consistent theme in our results was HPOs are more committed and intentional with collaborative learning, and they are more likely to see positive business outcomes. For example, HPOs utilize more collaborative learning today (5.5x more than LPOs) and they are planning to employ more of it in the future (3.2x more than LPOs).

Learner interaction isn't something to be treated as a detour or diversion from "training as usual," but that may be how many organizations approach it. So, in our survey we asked for an estimate of how deeply collaboration is ingrained in current training offerings. In our data, we saw a gap between how frequently a learner is likely to encounter collaborative opportunities depending on where they're employed — 54% of training at LPOs includes collaboration compared to 69% at HPOs. The 15% difference reflects a contrasting approach in strategy when it comes to how these organizations train their employees, as we've seen across our results (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8.

HPOs vs. LPOs: Training Offerings That Include Collaboration

5.5x
MORE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

4.4x
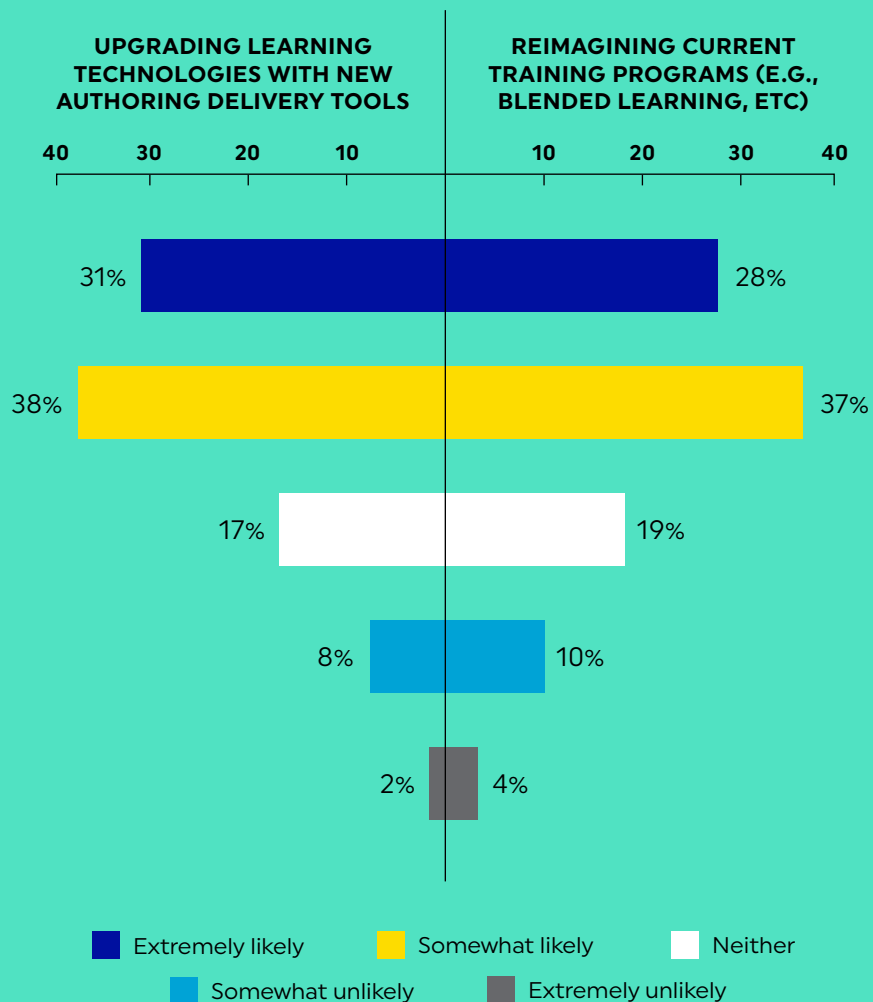MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PLATFORM

4.9x
POSITIVE BUSINESS RESULTS

3.2x
MORE LIKELY TO USE MORE IN THE FUTURE

FIGURE 9.

Probability of Changes to Training Operations

UPGRADING LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES WITH NEW AUTHORING DELIVERY TOOLS	REIMAGINING CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAMS (E.G., BLENDED LEARNING, ETC)
40 30 20 10	10 20 30 40
31%	28%
38%	37%
17%	19%
8%	10%
2%	4%

■ Extremely likely   ■ Somewhat likely   ▢ Neither
■ Somewhat unlikely   ■ Extremely unlikely

3. Today's collaboration relies on technology and strategy, it's not just about the learners.

When we look at our data about L&D priorities in the near future, what we see are organizations prioritizing upgrading new authoring and delivery technologies and reimagining current training programs, as shown in Figure 9. These data suggest that many L&D functions are at the precipice of opportunity, whereby leveraging new tools and reformulating current learning programs creates the opportunity to inject more purposeful learner interactions into training programs. As with our previous data, there is a distinct difference between HPOs and LPOs, with HPOs being 4 times as likely to upgrade technologies and tools than LPOs, and HPOs being 10.5 times as likely to reimagine their current programs.

Many organizations are looking for fit-for-purpose cohort learning platforms with features tailor-made for collaborative learning. Some of the popular features they seek include easy management of time-bound experiences, discussion forums, group workspaces and projects, video assignments with peer reviews, gamification and leaderboards to motivate and promote healthy competition, tools for easy facilitator tracking and communication, and an engaging, intuitive interface to navigate the entire learning experience in one application.

HPOs are 4x more likely to upgrade their learning technology than LPOs and 10.5x more likely to reimagine their training programs than LPOs.

Conclusion

So, given these insights and their implications, how many organizations are giving collaboration serious attention? The data from our survey of learning professionals tells us an increasing number of organizations — and especially high performers — are doing so. Is yours?

As employee training has shifted in the past few years to encompass more digital learning that relies on platforms playing nicely with existing information technology (IT) and human resources information system (HRIS) infrastructure, it's easy for the notion of collaboration to be overlooked or minimized. Forms of online learning have allowed organizations to work around recent pandemic-related restrictions to in-person training, while simultaneously expanding the reach of training to enable more employees to participate.

Across the findings in this report, we've seen that not only is learner collaboration in training beneficial to learners themselves, but it affords a variety of benefits to the organization. Our data paints a crisp portrait of HPOs as using collaborative learning for more of their learning offerings compared to LPOs. The good news is that if your company is late to the table on L&D strategy and practices, now is a great time to get learners connected and collaborating.

About This Research

ABOUT INTREPID

Intrepid is a cohort learning platform to connect, practice and build skills that develop your people and grow your business. You can create blended, context-rich learning experiences, amplifying content assets with cohort activities, real-world application, and live sessions. Intrepid scales seamlessly from dozens to thousands of users. Global companies use Intrepid to drive growth, reduce new hire time-to-impact, accelerate upskilling, improve employee engagement, scale customer and partner enablement, and reduce training costs. Intrepid is an operating business within VitalSource Technologies.

For more information, visit https://www.intrepidlearning.com.

ABOUT TRAINING INDUSTRY

Our focus is on providing dedicated business and training professionals the information, insight and tools needed to more effectively manage the business of learning. Our website spotlights the latest news, articles and best practices within the training industry.

For more information, visit https://www.trainingindustry.com.