



2019 SURVEY RESULTS

# State of High-Stakes Learning

PART 1: WHAT LEARNERS HAVE TO SAY



# Introduction

Intrepid by VitalSource surveyed 1,000 learners in the U.S. to determine:



## **What learners think**

are the most high-stakes training topics facing their organization.



## **What learners see**

as the best modalities for delivering high-stakes training.



## **Their assessment**

of the effectiveness of their organization's L&D culture.



## **How they feel**

about the viability of their professional development opportunities for growing careers.

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# Key Findings



The data is clear that collaborative learning, “learning with/from others,” is the most-preferred method of learning for respondents, regardless of the type of learning last delivered to them by their organization.



The highest-stakes business training initiatives facing organizations in the next two years are:

- Leadership/management skills
- Technology skills
- Soft Skills/Communication

Other top topics include onboarding, sales, marketing, diversity & inclusion, safety/compliance, and innovation.



**Culture: learners primarily feel their organization’s learning culture is less than effective, to put it mildly.** In fact, the overall assessment of professional development opportunities and learning culture, when negative, was very negative. And although nearly all respondents can see a clear link between their own professional development and the accomplishment of their company’s goals, few feel they have the support necessary to make meaningful changes in their day-to-day work lives through learning.



**The bad news is, learners feel their organizations are only somewhat able to tackle these critical initiatives,** and that the learning culture in their organizations currently isn’t going to help get the job done when it comes to both personal development and affecting the organization’s bottom line.

# What's Critical: High-Stakes Training from the Learner's POV

## WE ASKED LEARNERS:

What is the biggest, most important training topic your organization should focus on in the coming 2 years, the topic that is the biggest “business critical” pain point in your organization? (e.g. leadership, sales enablement, onboarding, soft skills – but could be anything pertinent to your organization’s successful future)

**Leadership/Management Skills | Soft Skills/Communication  
Technology Skills**

Additional topics included onboarding, sales, innovation, safety/compliance, marketing, and diversity & inclusion

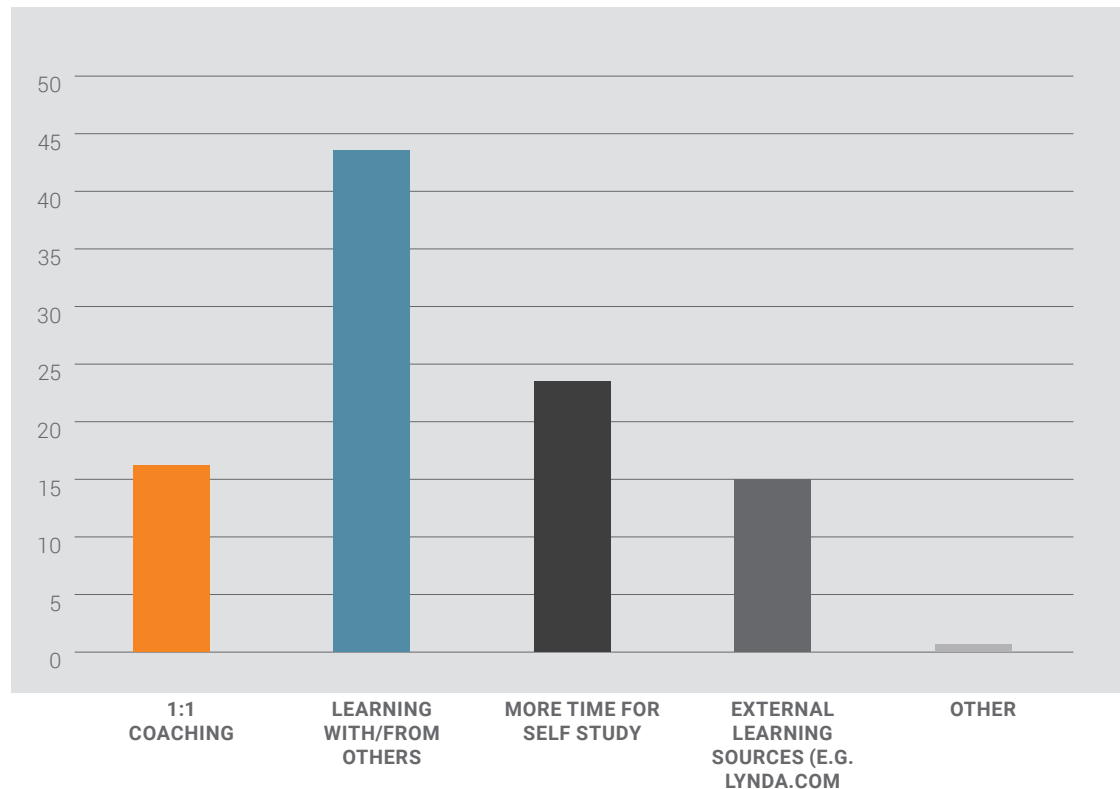
**Leadership and management skills** were top of the list by far, with soft skills/communication and keeping up with technology right behind. (Interestingly, many of the “technology” responses were related just to keeping up, not being cutting-edge.)

**It's people skills**, and overall leadership when it comes to the organization and to daily work life, that are considered the highest-stakes areas for organizations now and in the near future. And, learning “with and from others,” or collaboratively, is seen as the most-desired solution.



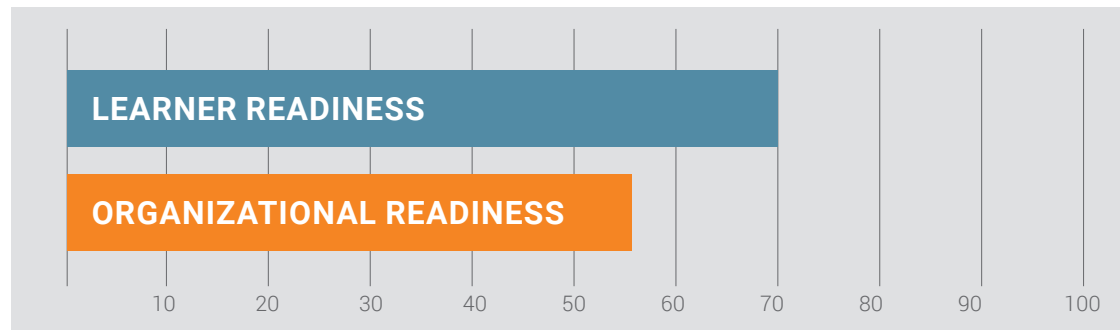
# What's Critical: High-Stakes Training from the Learner's POV

Regardless of the last type of training delivered, learners preferred collaborative learning by far when asked **What types of learning and development opportunities have the most value for you?**



# What's Critical: High-Stakes Training from the Learner's POV

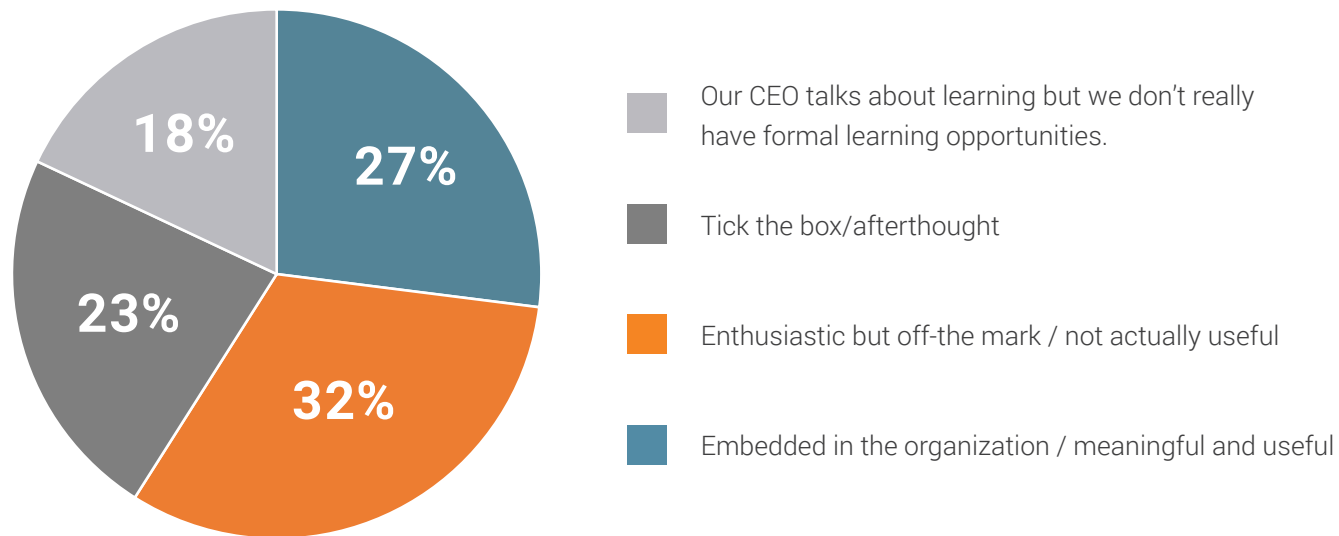
Learners ranked their own readiness is the most critical challenge facing their **organization** at 70 (on a scale of 0-100), while rating their organization's readiness for that same skill at only 56.



The bad news here for L&D is that leadership and soft skills are often difficult to define and impart, and technology is always changing therefore training for it constantly needs to be updated. The good news is, modern online learning can deliver impactful leadership and effective soft skills programs that result in behavior change and affect an organization across the enterprise in a way that addresses both what learners feel are the most critical topics for learning, and how they most want to be doing that learning.

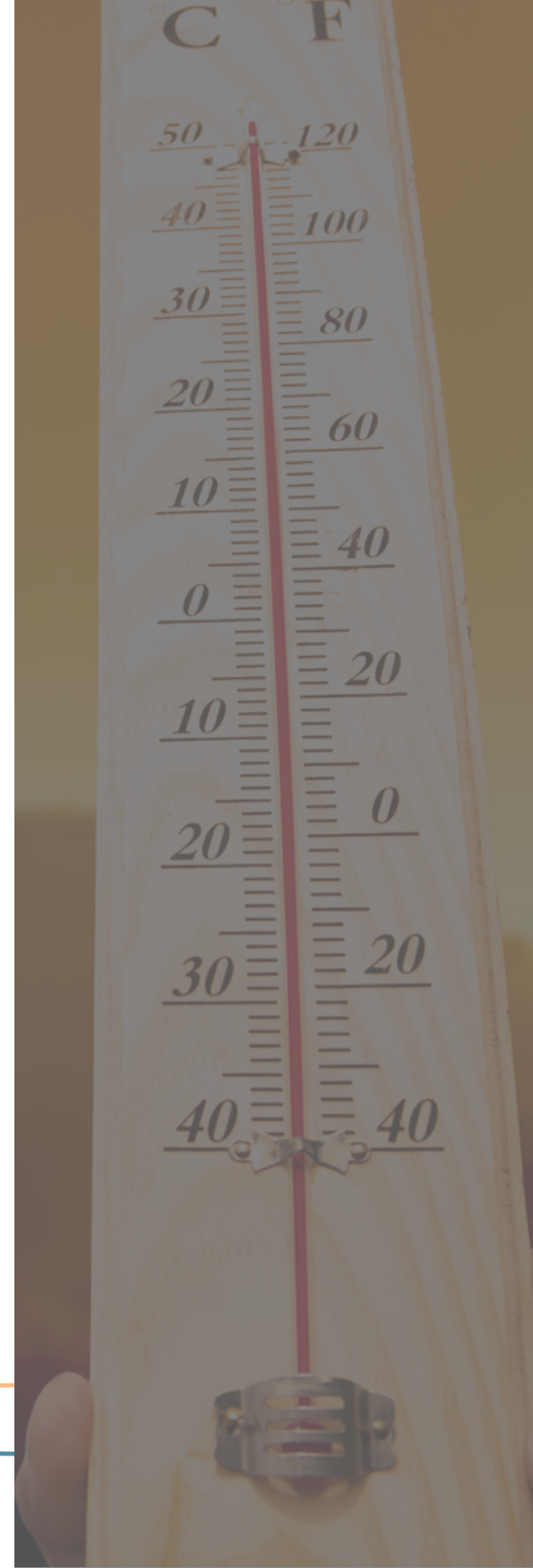
# What Learners Think About Their Organization's Learning Culture

We gave respondents four choices for rating their learning culture, and also asked them to put into their own words their feelings about their organization's L&D department.



Just over a quarter of respondents rated their learning culture as “Embedded in the organizational culture / meaningful and useful”. The rest chose options ranging from “afterthought” to “not actually useful” to “we don't really have formal learning opportunities.”

In other words, **nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of learners rate their learning culture as less-than-useful or meaningful.**



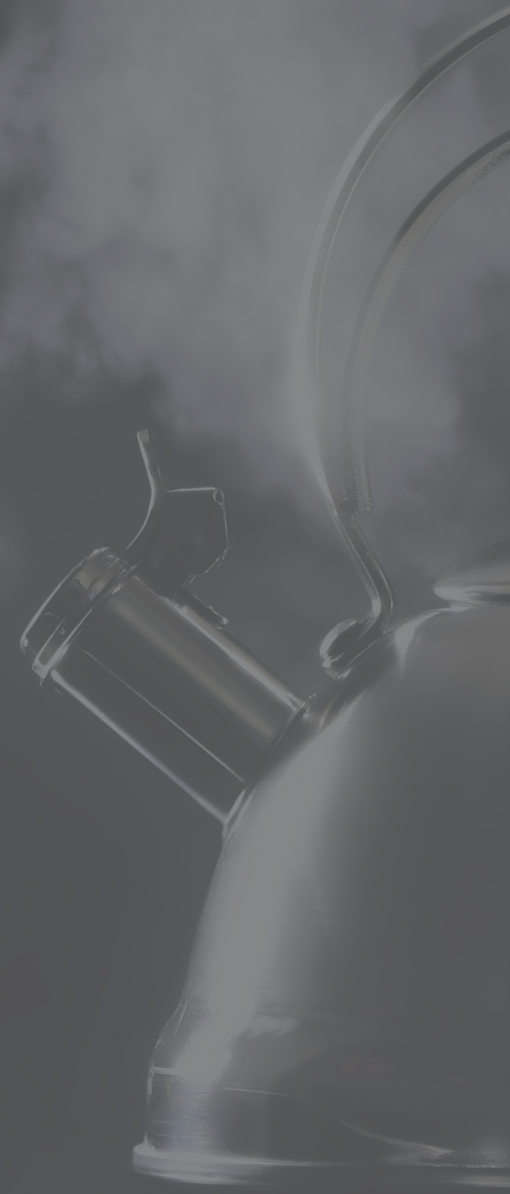


# What Learners Think About Their Organization's Learning Culture

In addition, the free-form field for “Words describing your organization's learning culture” garnered only about **40% positive terms**, with the **60% negative terms** being overall very negative in tone. The positive responses ranged in tone from “meh” to “satisfactory” with very few respondents raving about or highly praising their learning culture.

## Example negative descriptions of organizations' learning culture:

“Here's Lynda.com, stop asking us for learning”	“Do enough to get by”	“Too unstructured”
	“Forced”	“Behind the curve”
“Afterthought”		“One-size-fits-all style group workshops and trainings”
“Haphazard”	“Lip service”	
“Joke, ineffective, lazy, disengaged, out of touch, useless”	“Important in theory but not really effective in practice”	“Very poor”
	“Stagnant”	“There are a lot of options, but it's not very targeted and a lot of it is not that great”
	“Mediocre”	
“Negative and repressive”		
“A joke, irrelevant, obligatory”		



# What Learners Think About Their Organization's Learning Culture

When respondents answered this question positively, they used neutral to satisfactory words, but rarely words like “awesome” to describe their learning culture.

## Examples:

“Better than before”

“Available”

“Adequate”

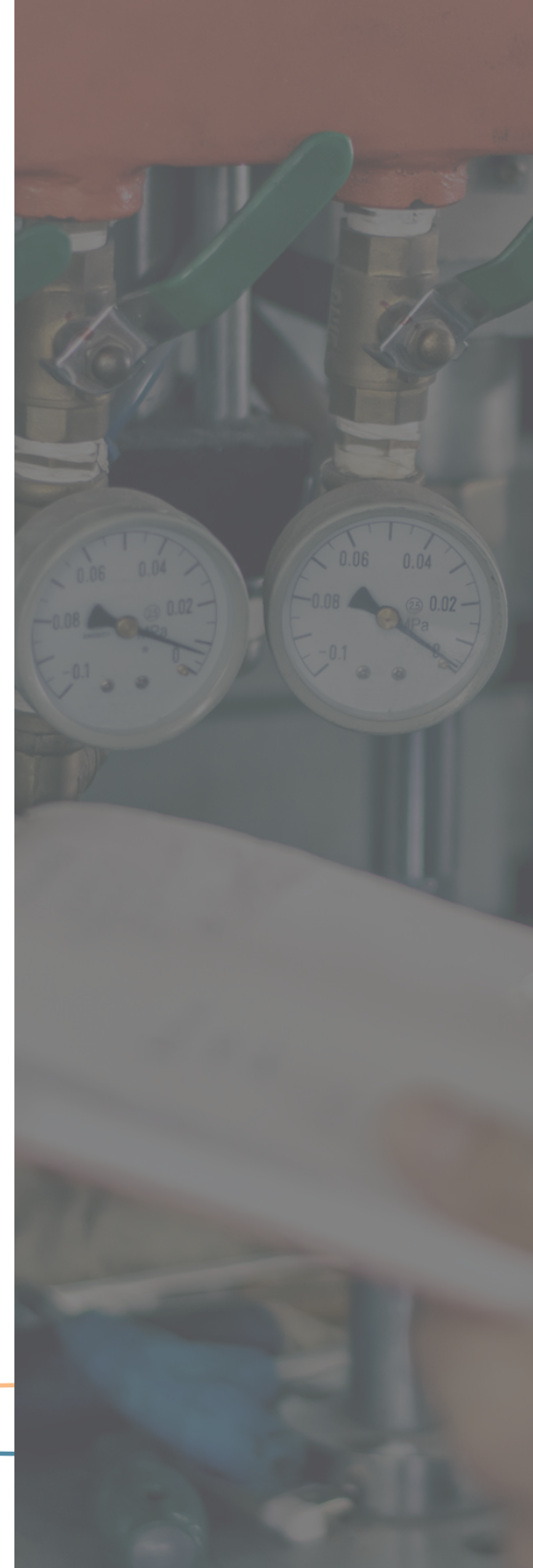
“Flexible, friendly”

“Getting there”

“Thorough”

“Meaningful, helpful,  
informative”

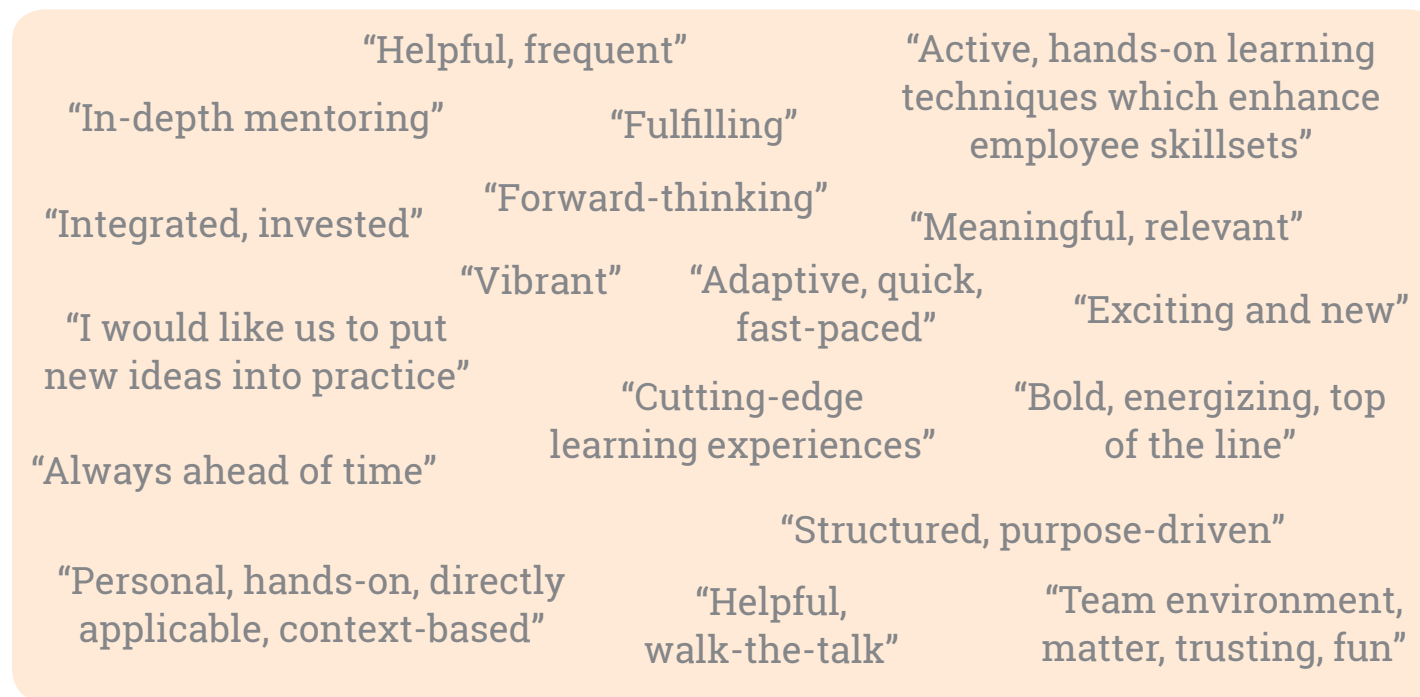
“Satisfactory”



# What Learners Think About Their Organization's Learning Culture

We also asked learners to share what they would ideally like their organization's learning culture to embody.

**Respondents had very firm opinions about this:**



Learners clearly want a vibrant and modern learning culture at work that is also useful, contextualized, immediately relevant, and readily available.



# The Connection Between Self and Organization

The overwhelming majority of respondents saw a clear and strong connection between their personal development and the company's critical business initiatives. The link is clear in most learners' minds: if the organization helps me grow, I will help grow the organization.

## Example "strong connection" quotes:



I think my personal development helps the company directly, but also helps inspire people around me to work better in the company.

If I improve, so does the whole organization.

The better prepared I am, the better prepared the business is for any potential problems in the future.

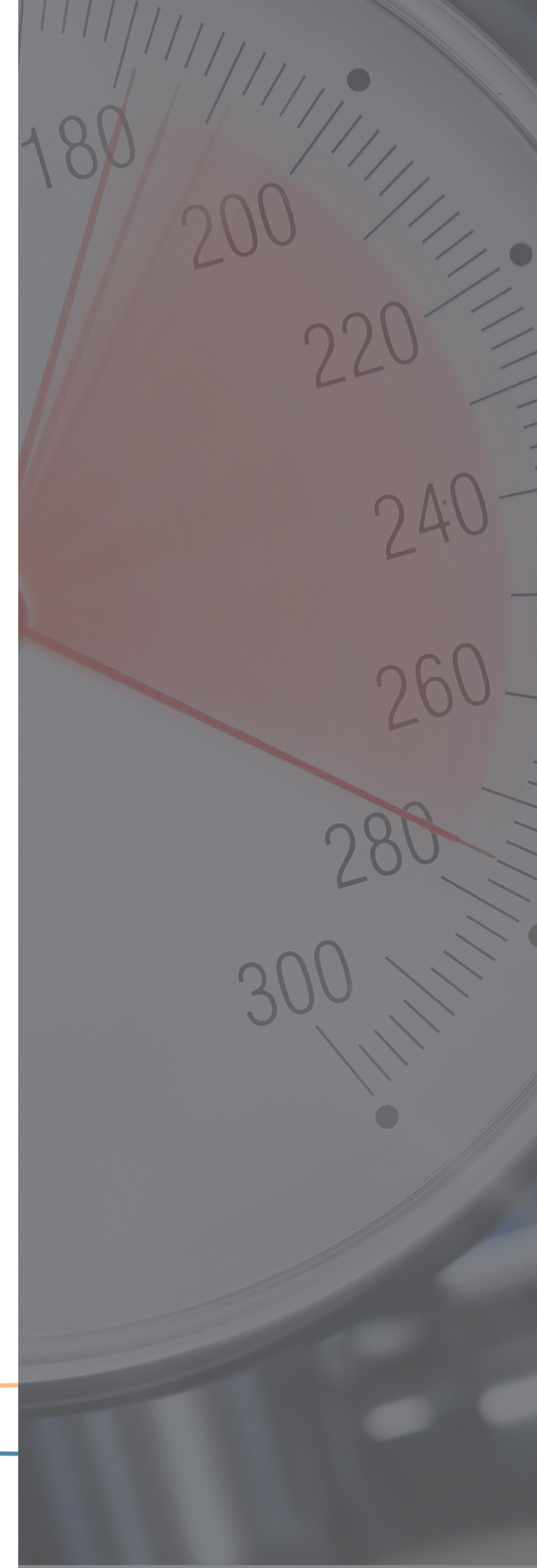
It helps you be more effective in your role. It also prepares you for a move into a higher, more critical role.

The more I learn and grow, the better I am able to assist the organization in the initiatives they want to focus on.

100% connection.



Importantly, even the responses of learners who said that the relationship between personal learning and organizational goals was indirect or nonexistent reveal enormous opportunity for engaging and applicable learning to make a difference in employee engagement.



# The Connection Between Self and Organization

For example, strategic change or leadership initiatives cascaded to the entire company with the context to make it clear how each person's role fits into the overall company momentum, has the potential to change the minds of those who think:

“

I am a small part of it.

I think the connection is tenuous at best.

I am not sure. My personal development revolves around me wanting to be the best me that I can be where the company just doesn't seem like they care about the employees or growth.

It's very weak, if anything.

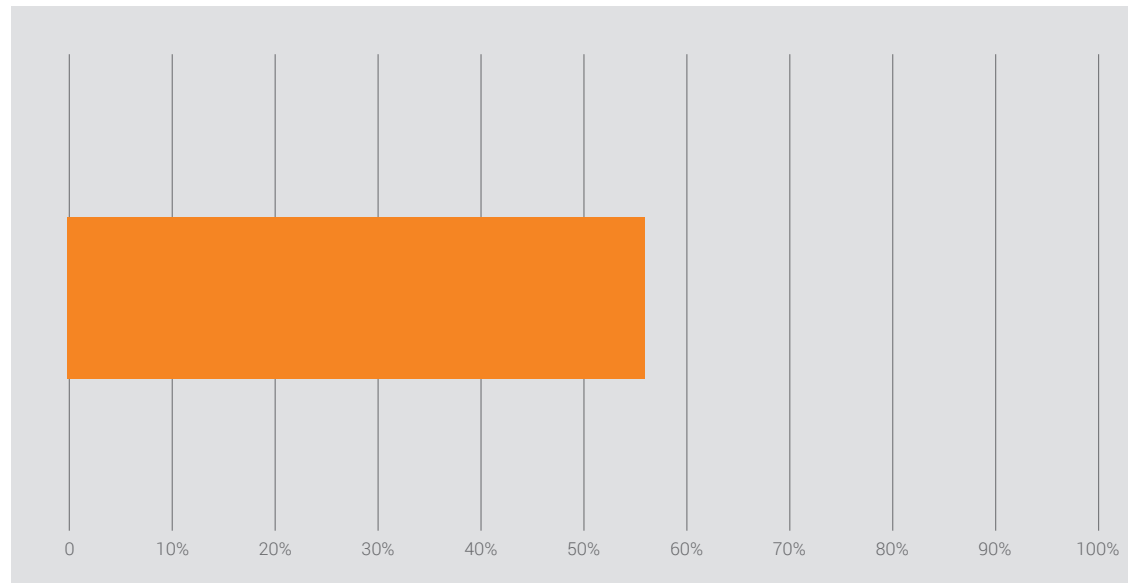
”

The problem is, learners find their learning culture ineffective, their professional development options limited, and, as outlined below, are not applying the learning they are getting when back on the job.

# State of Learning Application

On a scale of 0-100, respondents rated “How much did learning and development in your organization help grow your career last year?” at only 56.

**How much did learning and development in your organization  
help grow your career last year?**

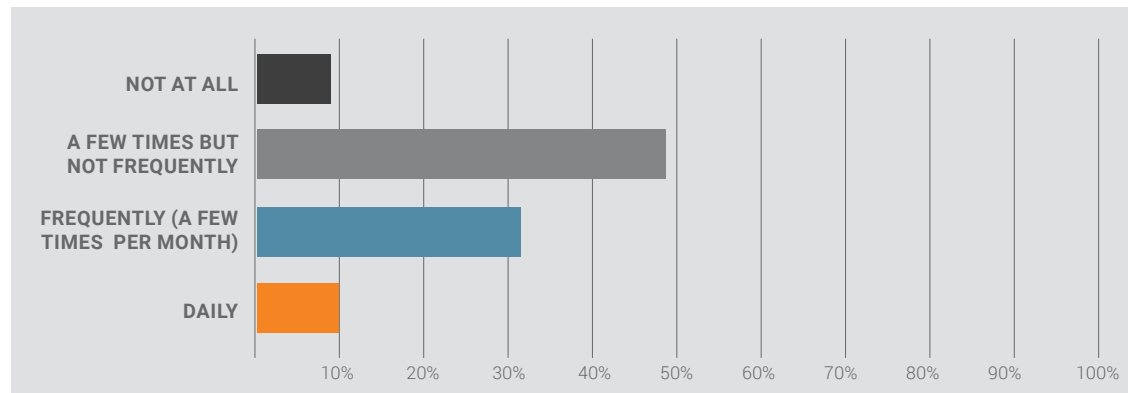




# State of Learning Application

In addition, nearly half (47.24%) of learners say they are applying the learning from their last professional development opportunity at work “A few times but not frequently.” Nearly 10% said they’re not applying the learning on the job at all, while at the other end of the scale, a mere 10.55% say they use the learning daily. Only 33.01% of respondents are using their learning “a few times a month.”

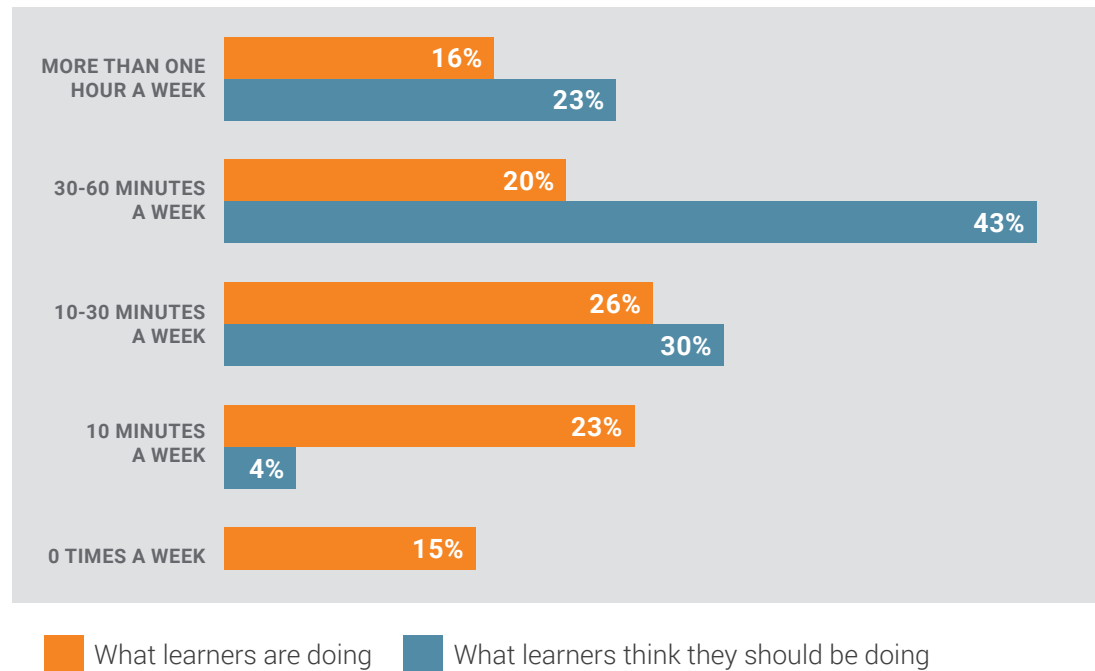
**How much of what you learned in that program  
have you applied in your work since then?**



The conclusion is clear: there is a real disconnect between the learning offered by organizations, and application back on the job. We see great opportunity here for learning programs to improve by adding the necessary organizational context and on-the-job application so that learners know for sure how they can apply their new skills or changed behaviors on the job.

# State of Learning Application

In addition, there is a disconnect between the amount of time learners think is needed to make a meaningful change in the effectiveness of their day-to-day worklife, and the amount of time they are currently devoting to professional development per week.



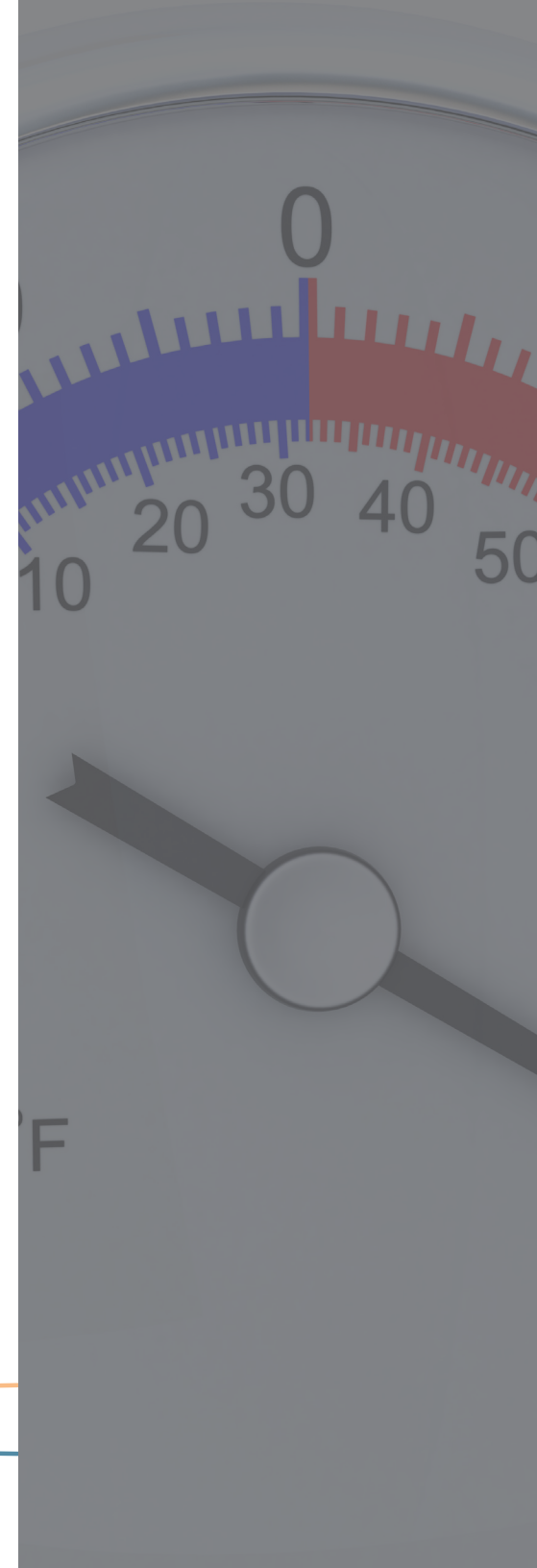
Only a half-hour to one hour per week is all that's needed to make a meaningful change, according to learners, but, as has been explored in many another survey, they feel they aren't given the time to devote to it, with most respondents actually spending just 0-30 minutes per week on learning.

# Lessons to be Learned for L&D About the State of High-Stakes Corporate Learning in 2019

Learning leaders should heed what their learners are saying about high-stakes training. Although role-specific or level-specific skills like customer service and onboarding also made the list, leadership/management and soft skills—those areas related to how people communicate, relate to one another, and impart both information and motivation—are seen as the most critical “pain points” facing organizations today. “Pain points” about which their learning organizations are failing them.

Learning leaders should be very concerned about how individuals are receiving their efforts. **The data clearly shows that learners yearn for an embedded learning culture, on-the-job application, and the time to develop their careers, but aren't getting those options.** They see their current learning organizations as more of an impediment than a help, and they have a clear point of view about what makes a great learning culture.

In addition, learners would like just a half-an-hour more per week to work on their professional development, and prefer it to be collaborative learning. Online learning modalities can offer chunked but contextualized learning “in the flow of work” and learning programs can draw straighter lines between content and corporate context.





# Lessons to be Learned for L&D About the State of High-Stakes Corporate Learning in 2019

In summary, the state of critical high-stakes business challenges is 'unprepared' and the state of the learner in 2019 is 'quite frustrated.'

The silver lining is that learners are ready for and hoping that L&D will take steps to improve in culture, delivery, and application of learning when it comes to the high-stakes challenges their organizations face, and collaborative online learning can answer these gaps enterprise-wide. The responses reveal that opportunities are wide open for corporate L&D to:

- ✓ **DELIVER HIGH-STAKES TRAINING** in ways that will have a real and immediate impact on both individuals and the organization.
- ✓ **CHANGE LEARNERS' OPINIONS** of their organization's learning culture to the positive.
- ✓ **BUILD A STRONGER SENSE OF CONNECTION** between personal professional development and the company's bottom line, even amongst the most disengaged employees.
- ✓ **DELIVER THE KIND OF COLLABORATIVE, CONTEXTUALIZED DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES** learners crave on the topics that will have the most impact







2019 SURVEY RESULTS

# State of High-Stakes Learning

PART 2: CLOS WEIGH IN



# Overview

Intrepid by VitalSource and Chief Learning Officer surveyed over 400 learning leaders to determine:



## **What leaders see**

as the most high-stakes training topics facing their organization.



## **How leaders**

want to deliver high-stakes training.



## **Their assessment**

of their organization's L&D culture, and challenges faced improving it.



## **The top barriers facing leaders**

when it comes to delivering high-stakes learning effectively.

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# Key Findings



## Collaborative learning is the preferred modality for high-stakes training

- Although organizations currently use classroom training for high-stakes topics (87%), they overwhelmingly wish they were using collaborative learning (82%)



## Leadership and management skills are far and away the single most critical business issue facing organizations

- This answer was 6 times more common than any other choice



## Learning leaders feel that their organizations aren't ready to deliver on high-stakes business challenges

- An average of 50% readiness, with most companies rating themselves in the middle of the 1-100 scale rather than extremes at either end
- The biggest roadblocks to delivering more effective high-stakes learning are competing priorities (40%), leadership buy-in (17%), and resistance to change (15%)



## Organizational learning cultures are rated, by leaders themselves, as “a burden,” “fragmented,” and “transitional” more often than “open” and “effective”

- Barriers to improving organizational learning culture include resistance to change (60%), lack of budget (46%), and lack of clarity on what the learning culture should be (38%)

**In summary, learning leaders see how best to deliver on their biggest high-stakes challenge but are finding themselves not quite able to get there yet.**

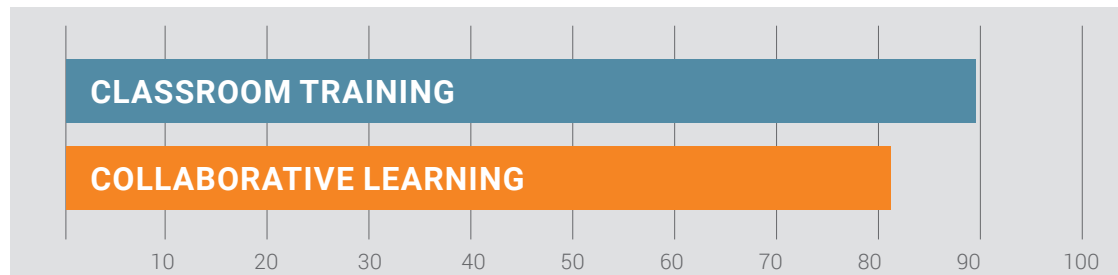


# What's Critical: High-Stakes Training from the CLO's POV

## WE ASKED CLOS:

What is the biggest, most important training topic your organization should focus on in the coming 2 years, the topic that is the biggest “business critical” pain point in your organization — anything pertinent to your organization’s successful future?

And the answer was overwhelming: leadership and management skills. In fact this answer was six times greater than any other choice (soft skills, sales, onboarding, diversity & inclusion, etc.)



The bad news here for L&D is that currently leadership and other high-stakes learning topics are being delivered primarily by classroom training (89%) even though CLOs see a clear need for the utilization of collaborative learning for increasing the impact of high-stakes learning (82%).

*Clearly, there is a need for a shift in learning modality from traditional to modern and collaborative.*

# What Leaders Think About Their Own Learning Culture

When asked to describe, in a free-form field, their own learning culture, **CLOs were surprisingly harsh about the state of their learning organization:**



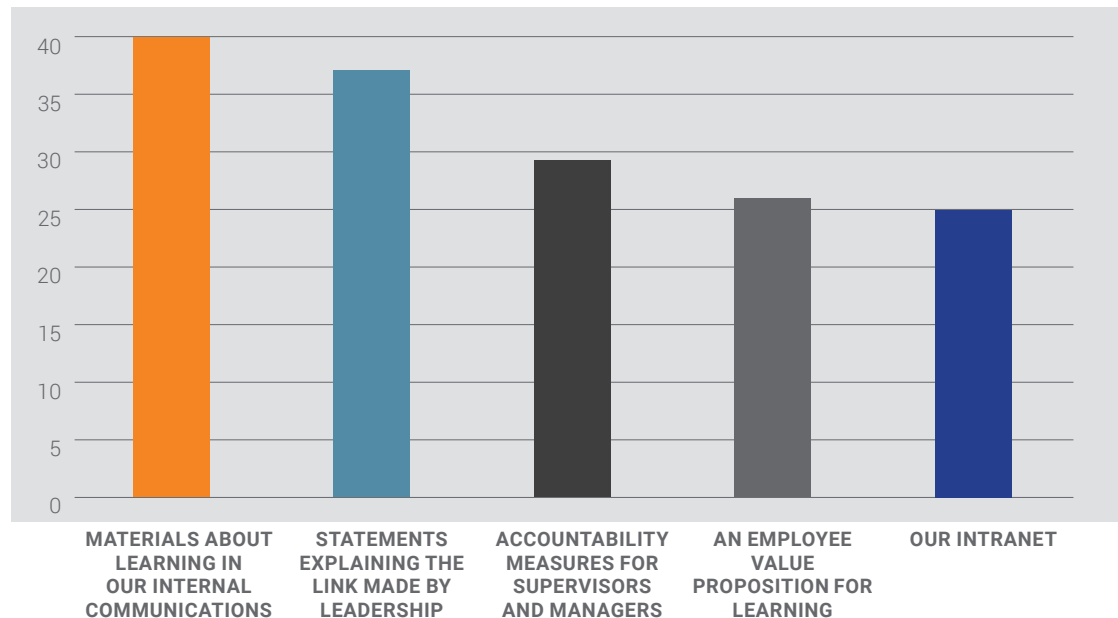
This tells us that there is room for improvement via newer, more engaging learning experiences and opportunities.



# Professional Development: Communication and Time Allotted

Nearly a third of all organizations say they don't communicate the link between personal development and the organization's strategy and goals at all (32%) – **a striking lapse in delineating the link between learning and application back on the job.** The other methods of communication used vary widely:

**THE OTHER METHODS OF COMMUNICATION USED VARY WIDELY:**

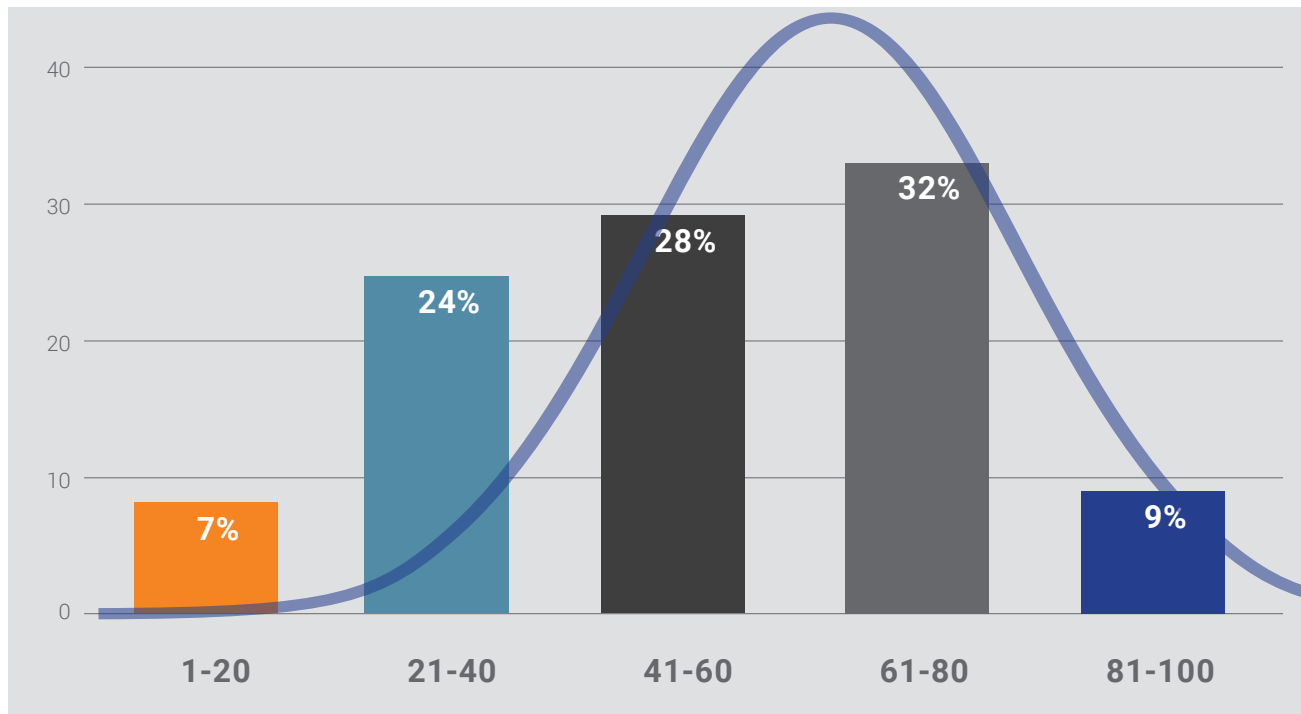


And the overwhelming majority of respondents say the amount of time allocated for employees to complete high-stakes learning programs is too little (68%). Only 29% rated the amount of time given as "enough."



# Barriers to Improvement

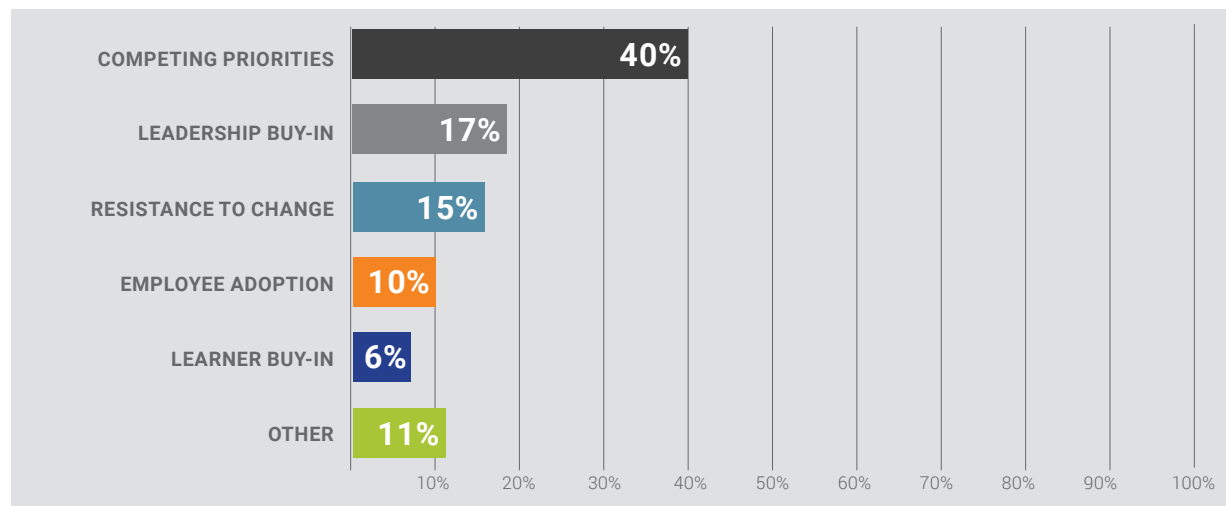
Only an average of 53% of organizations say they are ready to tackle high-stakes challenges. In fact, it's a bell curve with nearly everyone grouped in the middle.



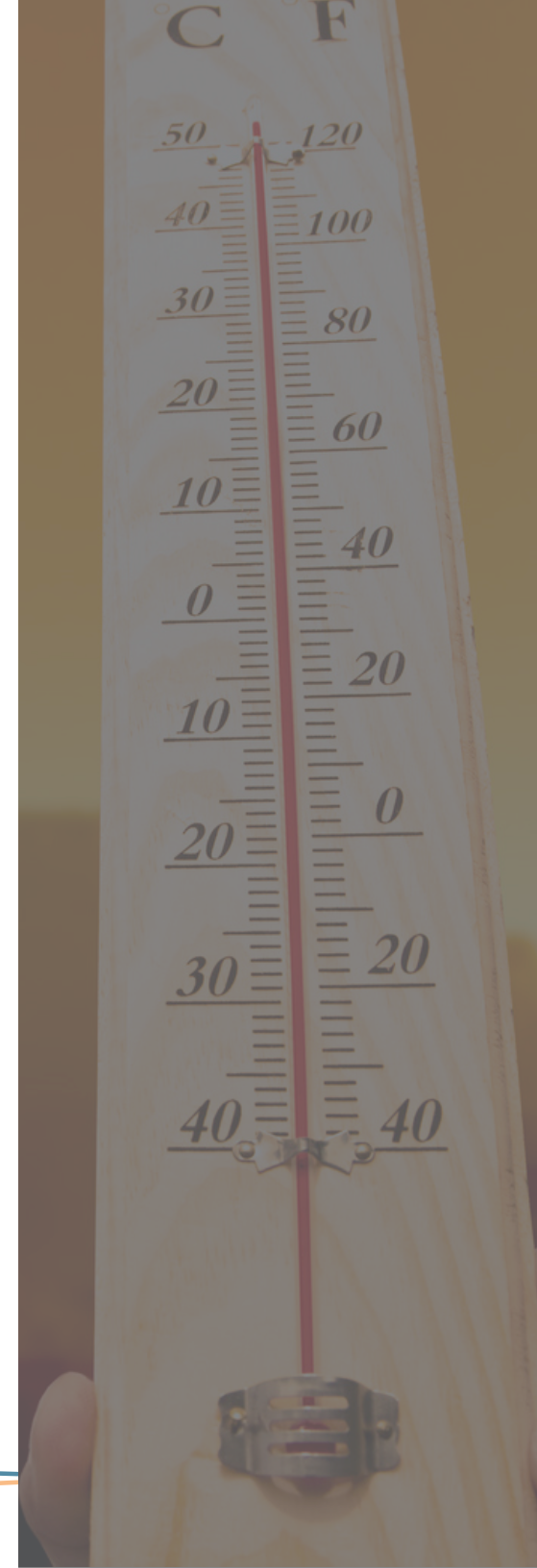
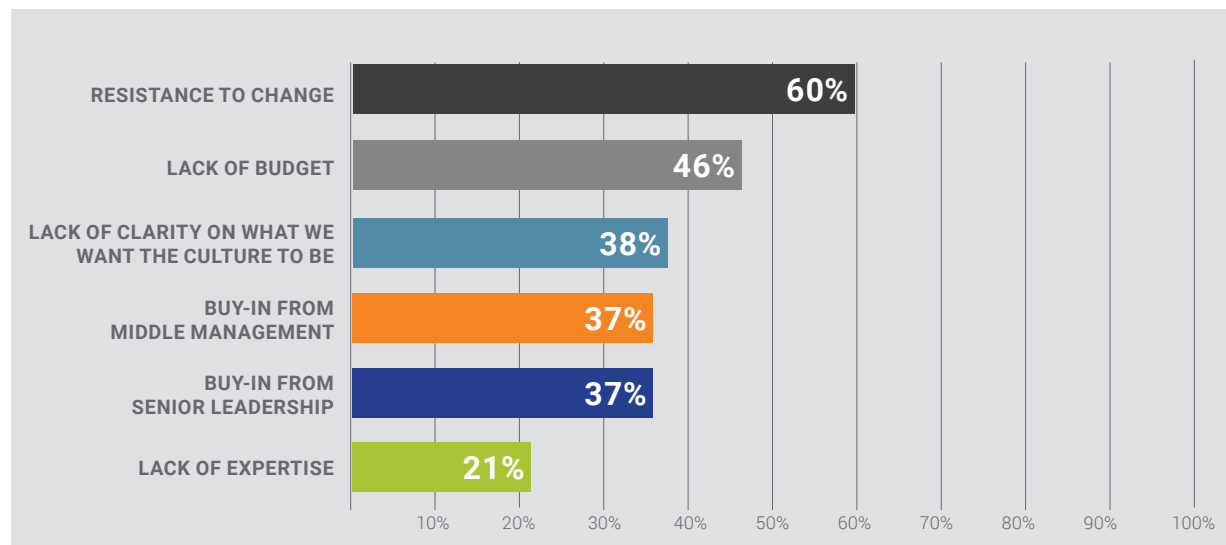
Interestingly, "lack of budget" is seen as a barrier to improving the learning culture, but hardly ranks at all on the list of biggest barriers to increasing the impact of high-stakes training.



## BIGGEST CHALLENGE THEY FACE IN INCREASING THE IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES TRAINING?



## BIGGEST ROADBLOCKS TO CHANGING THE LEARNING CULTURE AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?



# Lessons to be Learned in 2019

- ☑ **L&D leaders seem clear but stuck when it comes to high-stakes learning.** They know their most critical topic, and the best way to deliver on it, but have big roadblocks to implementing and improving their learning delivery.
- ☑ **It is also notable that CLOs rated their own learning cultures as primarily negative in tone.** And that only 58% say that high-stakes training is defined in alignment with the needs of their organization's business strategy.
- ☑ **What does all this suggest for a way forward when it comes to business and mission-critical topics?** That a new solution is required. Old-school modalities like classroom training, while widespread, are also widely ineffective, as evidenced by the organizational readiness average of 50%.
- ☑ **On the plus side, CLOs are clear that collaborative learning is the most ideal way to deliver on high-stakes learning topics.** Arming themselves with the communication, clarity and oomph needed to overcome the roadblocks standing between them and true organizational readiness will go a long way towards changing the status quo for the better.



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