



The State of High-Stakes Learning

2021 Survey Results

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For the third year, Intrepid by VitalSource surveyed 1,000 employees in the U.S. to determine what they consider to be the most critical training topics facing their organization, and, new this year, how they prefer to consume online learning.

The elephant in the room was of course the changes to worklife forced by the pandemic, and the resulting changes forced onto corporate training. Things shifted online, things shifted remote, programs were modified, put off, or outright cancelled. Companies had to scramble, and learners faced new challenges—making the trend data year over year even more compelling.

The trends are clear, even though 2020 was such a topsy-turvy year: leadership is the most critical training topic for the 3rd year in a row, and learners most prefer collaborative learning (learning with/from others) for their corporate training. Learner assessments of their organizations' learning cultures slight improved from 2019 but are still mostly "meh" to "negative" – leaving yet more room for improvement.

New information this year reveals that 82% of learners were indeed offered corporate training in the skills they rated as most critical to their organization's success, a good sign for business strategy and learning alignment. Additionally, learners laid out what they see as the best and worst parts of online learning based on their 2020 experiences, and a blended approach with collaborative learning at the center hits the pros and negates the cons.



Collaborative Learning

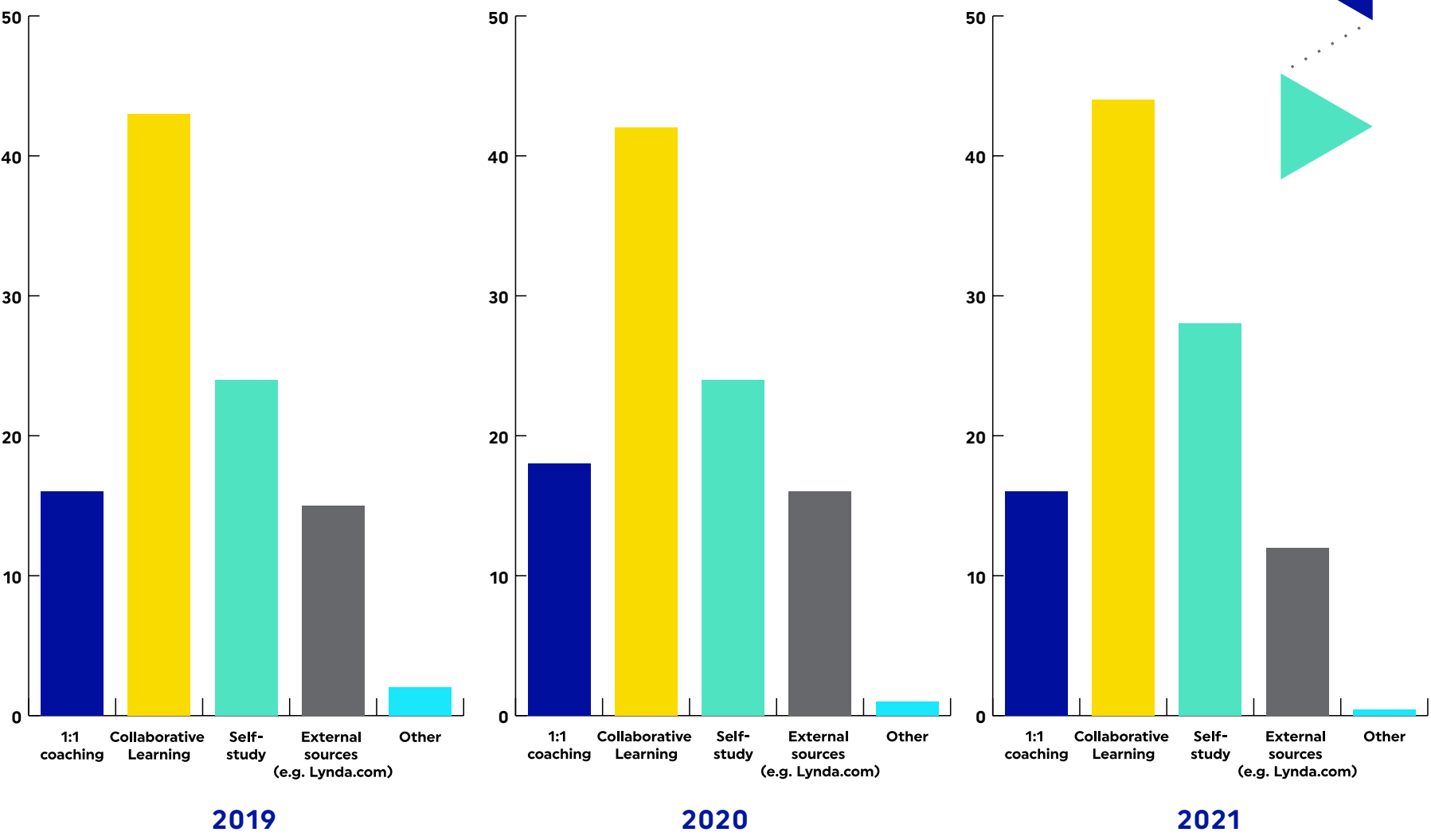
Gets the Most Voices, Again

The trend is crystal clear: learning with and from peers is the most preferred modality for corporate training, regardless of the type of digital learning last taken. Smart organizations will look to collaborative online learning, digital blends which emphasize interaction, and opportunities for creating cohorts within larger learning groups to meet this learner demand for effective training.

See Intrepid's **Blended Learning Infographic** for more.

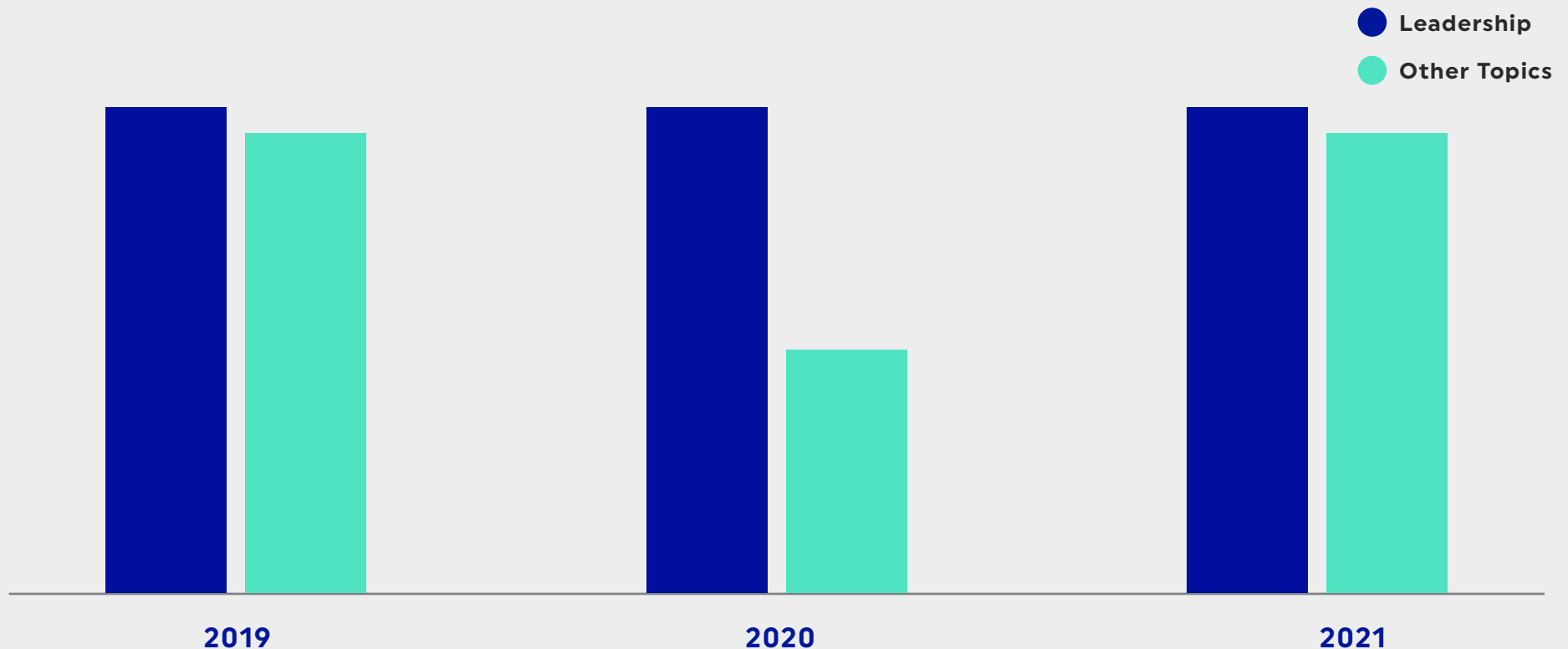


WHAT TYPE OF LEARNING HAS THE MOST VALUE FOR YOU?



Leadership, Leadership, Leadership

Leadership has been the top choice for learners for “Most Critical Business Training Topic Facing Your Organization” since our survey started in 2019. The first year, it was but one of several topics of strong interest to survey respondents. In early 2020, leadership was chosen twice as often as the next most critical topic, cybersecurity. This year, although leadership is again at the top, other critical training skill sets are not far behind. This indicates that learners are concerned about their organizations’ performance across the board after the rocky ride of 2020. Luckily, strong leadership skills are a leading indicator of success in other areas learners also see as important, like onboarding, sales enablement, WFH skills and COVID-19 safety preparedness.



Expert Analysis

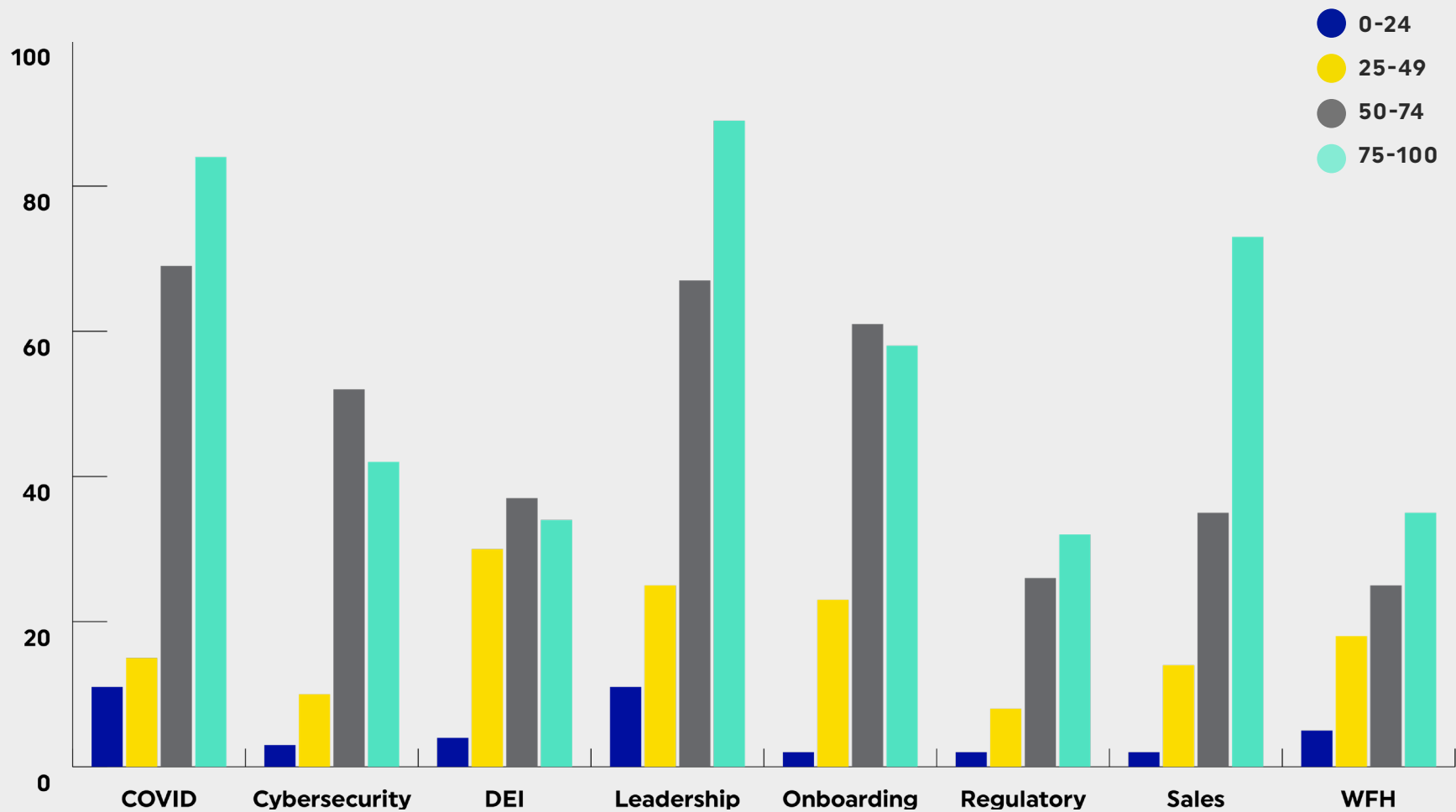


Our research has shown that organizations who are most successful in reaching their goals are those that prioritize and invest in leadership development – and clearly employees feel the importance of good leadership as well. What the past year has shown us is that this continues to be true during times of great uncertainty. The wrinkle with the new online focus to training is how to stay connected – leaders connected to their employees, leaders connected to each other. That’s where good online learning can rise to the occasion, and create human connection digitally so that leaders can hear others voices, get guidance from peers and mentors, and grow as leaders. People are complex, leadership is complicated and nuanced, and leaders need to be both competent and connected – things which digital blended and collaborative online approaches can empower.

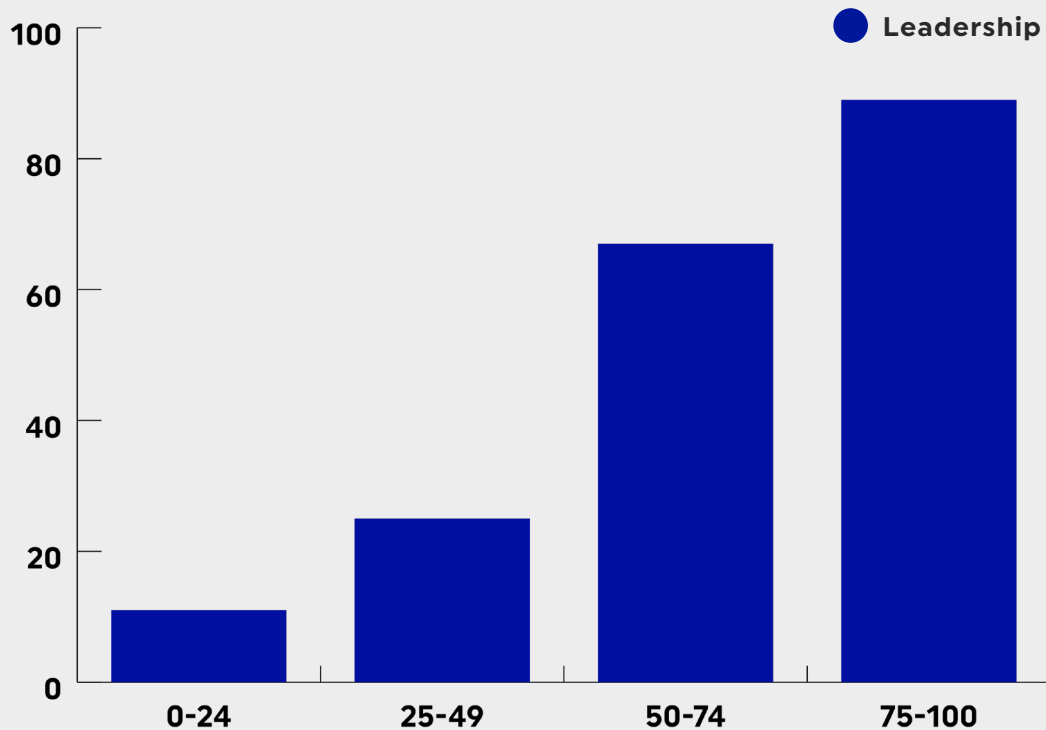
LEAH CLARK, GP STRATEGIES, SENIOR DIRECTOR, LEADERSHIP

The average rating, overall, for company readiness in critical training topics was a 68 on a scale of 0 (not at all ready) to 100 (completely ready). Fairly strong, but it gets interesting when you break down the responses into quadrants on that 0-100 scale.

For instance, all topics shows up across the board, with learners rating their companies as both not at all ready (0-24), mid-range (25-49), pretty good (50-74), and very strong (75-100).



Let's focus in on leadership:

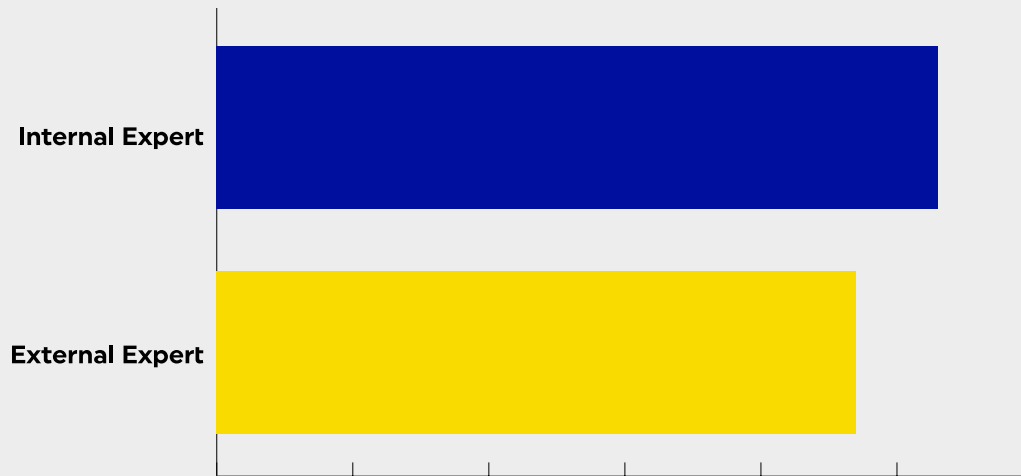


Although "company readiness" in leadership is strongest in the highest category, it shows up across the board, telling us that leadership strength in organizations varies widely organization to organization, and there is room for improvement.

When asked how leadership is most often defined at their organization, survey respondents chose "Management skills including soft skills (e.g. communication)" over 40% of the time, with "Strategic vision / strategic transformation" coming in second at 27%.



Interestingly, learners are nearly split on who they prefer to learn leadership skills from:



This suggests another good use of the digital blend approach: the ease of taking third-party content and contextualizing it with short videos focusing on company context from internal leaders.

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES:

- [United Overseas Bank's Leadership program \(video\)](#)
- [Leadership Development Success with Enact Leadership and Navis \(video\)](#)
- [Leadership Development Cascade \(case study\)](#)
- [Power of High-Potential Leadership Program Boosted \(case study\)](#)
- [Getting the Right Digital Blend to Accelerate Your Organization's Leadership Capacities \(video\)](#)

eLearning and vILT Are Still Leading the Pack, Alas

When asked what types of online learning did you participate in last year, self-paced e-learning and virtual instructor-led training lead the way, which is a disappointing, if not unexpected trend. But there is great opportunity in 2021 for companies which had to switch quickly to digital deliveries and chose the fastest paths of least resistance (vILT and e-learning) to move their programs to the next level of effectiveness with blended learning and collaborative online learning.

ACCORDING TO SURVEY RESPONDENTS, THE BEST PART OF LEARNING ONLINE, BASED ON YOUR TRAINING EXPERIENCES IN 2020:



**Able to take
at/go at own pace**



**Can repeat or
re-visit content
need to spend
more time on**



**Convenience and
flexibility of time
to learn**



**Learn from /
interact with peers
/ collaborate /
social interaction
at a distance**

THE WORST PART OF LEARNING ONLINE, BASED ON YOUR TRAINING EXPERIENCES IN 2020:



Dealing with
distractions
at home



Easier to
procrastinate /
harder to motivate



E-learning is
isolating



Can't ask questions
of instructor /
takes a long time
for response



No personal
interaction with
other students



Less interaction /
more boring

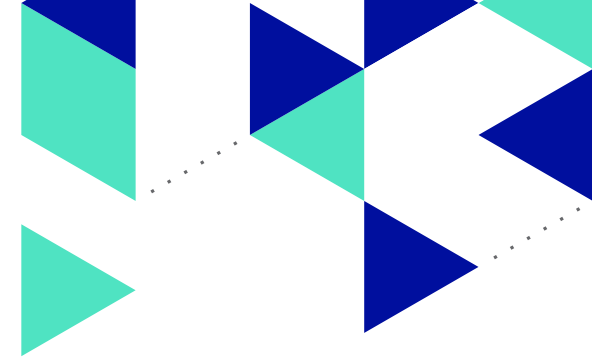


Connection issues
/ video/audio
quality bad /
internet issues

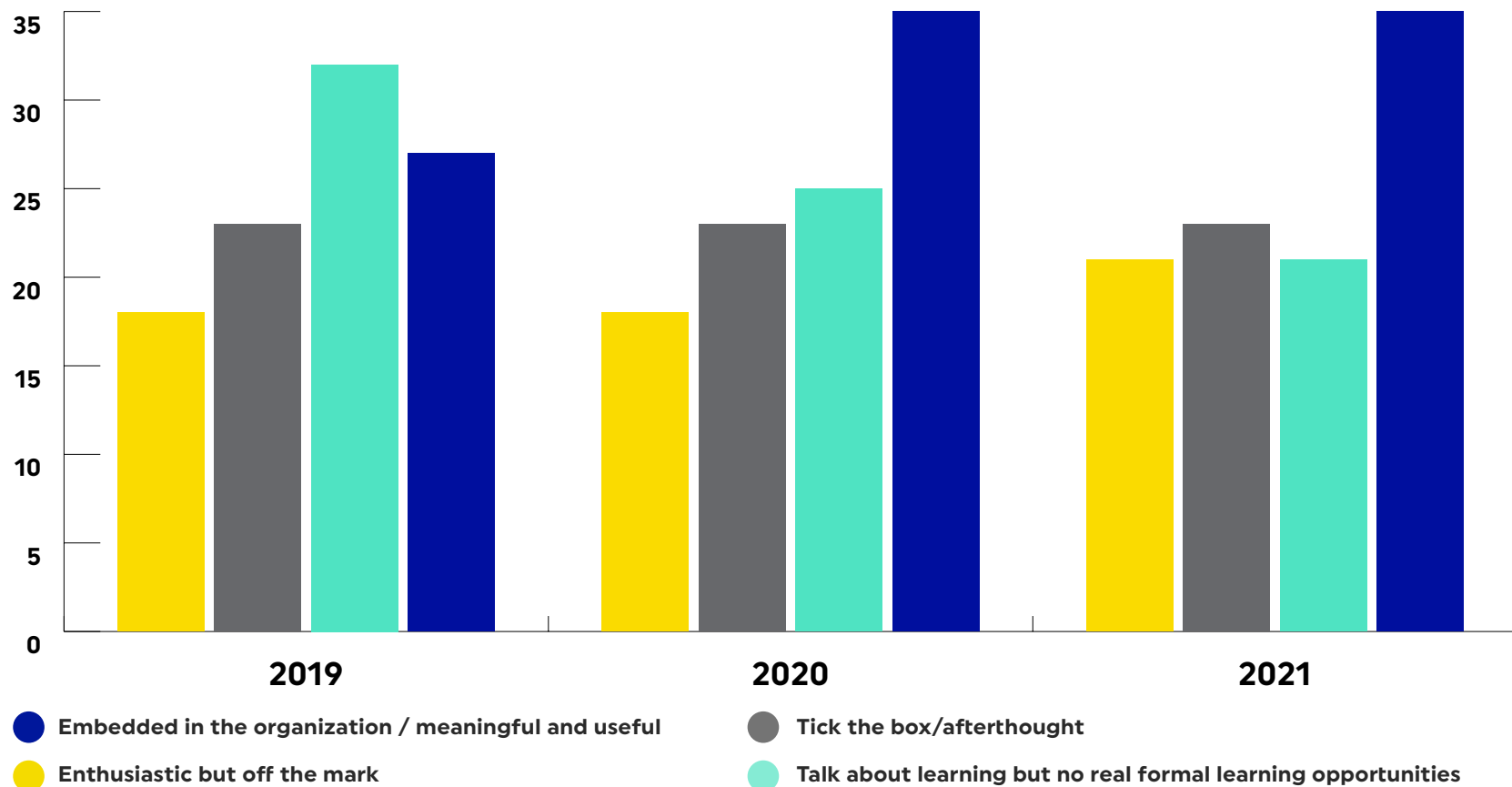
See the [Definitive Guide to Collaborative Online Learning](#) for more about how collaborative learning can boost the pros mentioned above, and negate the cons, when it comes to online learning.

Learning Culture

Getting Better, Not There Yet



WHICH ANSWER BEST DESCRIBES THE LEARNING CULTURE AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?



Although the numbers have improved since 2019, there is clearly still room for organizations to more deeply embed meaningful L&D opportunities for all learners in their organizations.

In Conclusion

2020 may have been a murky year in many ways, but corporate learners are clear about their priorities and goals for learning opportunities in 2021, and it behooves organizations to pay attention. Deliver learning through collaborative, learner-centric, human-centric modalities for the most bang for your buck. Focus on leadership (and other critical business skills will also rise). Work on embedding learning in the organization in a meaningful, useful, and contextualized way. And your learners will thank you for it, no matter what new worldwide challenges may arise in 2021.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1,002 learners in the U.S. surveyed
- Company size: 500-999: 40%, 1,000-4,999: 29%, 5,000-9,999: 12%, 10,000-19,999: 6%, 20,000+13 %
- Sectors: Banking/Finance, Healthcare, Transportation, Manufacturing, Retail, Software/Technology, Professional Services/Consulting, and Other



