THE FUTURE OF LEARNING IS DIGITAL

But What Does that Look Like?

2021

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Introduction

In the not-too-distant past, the term "blended learning" meant that there were some eLearning courses available to take between in-person, instructor-led training sessions. Back then, the only technology line-item in the L&D budget was the LMS. Simpler times, perhaps, but this environment was not turning out any really impactful learning that met the needs of the learner and fit into their workflow. In recent years, there have been a great deal of advancements in learning technology, opening up a world of digital alternatives. And while most companies embraced this digital transformation, few knew what it actually meant and how to pull it all together. As companies struggled to get the ball rolling with new digital modalities, 2020 brought with it a pandemic that pushed the ball off a cliff.

Prior to COVID-19, the vast majority of workplace learning took place in a classroom. Brandon Hall Group's 2019 *L&D Benchmarking Study* found that 96% of companies used ILT to some degree. Once the pandemic set in and working from home became the norm, in-person training was no longer feasible.

By the end of 2020, 92% of companies said the pandemic had caused their use of ILT to decrease and two-thirds of companies said their use of ILT would continue to drop over the next 18 to 24 months.
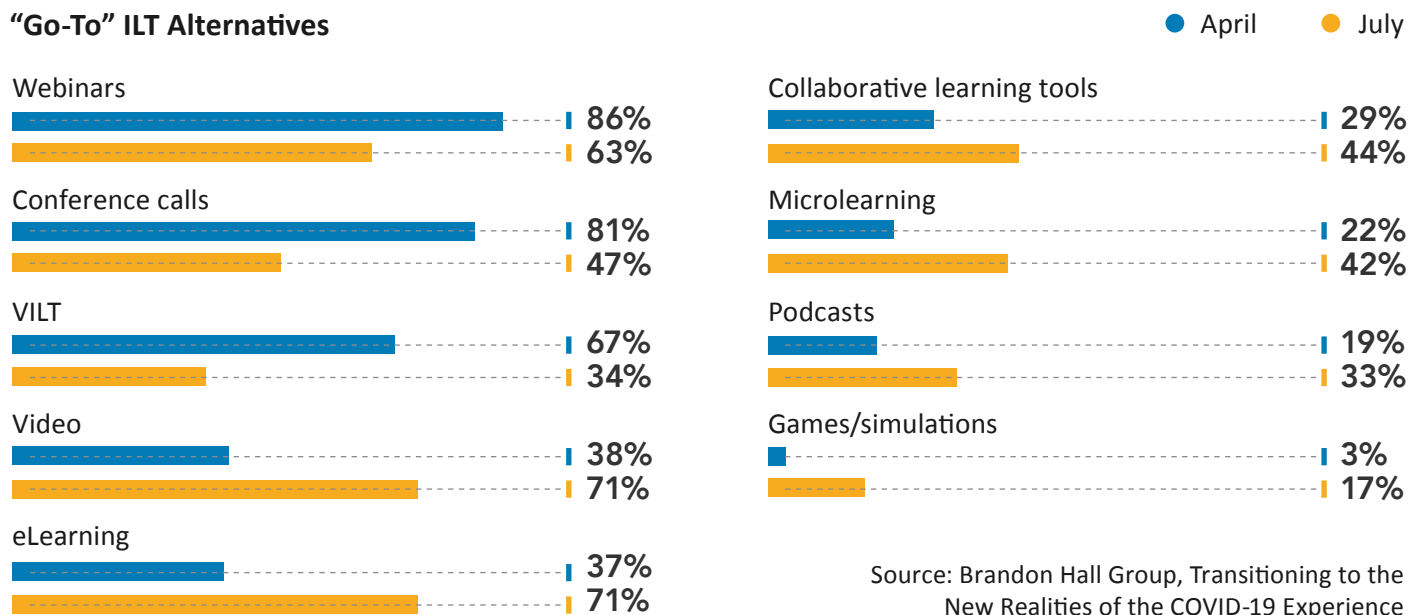
With ILT off the table, companies turned to whatever they had available. For most, that meant web-conferencing tools and virtual classrooms. The problem with this approach is that it takes an already inefficient strategy and attempts to digitize it, with unsurprisingly poor results. It's as if companies see every training opportunity as a nail and once their ILT hammer was taken away, they just bought a newer, fancier hammer. In most cases, taking an ILT class and dropping it into a webinar is a recipe for failure, especially when you consider that virtual instruction requires a completely different skill set than the classroom requires.
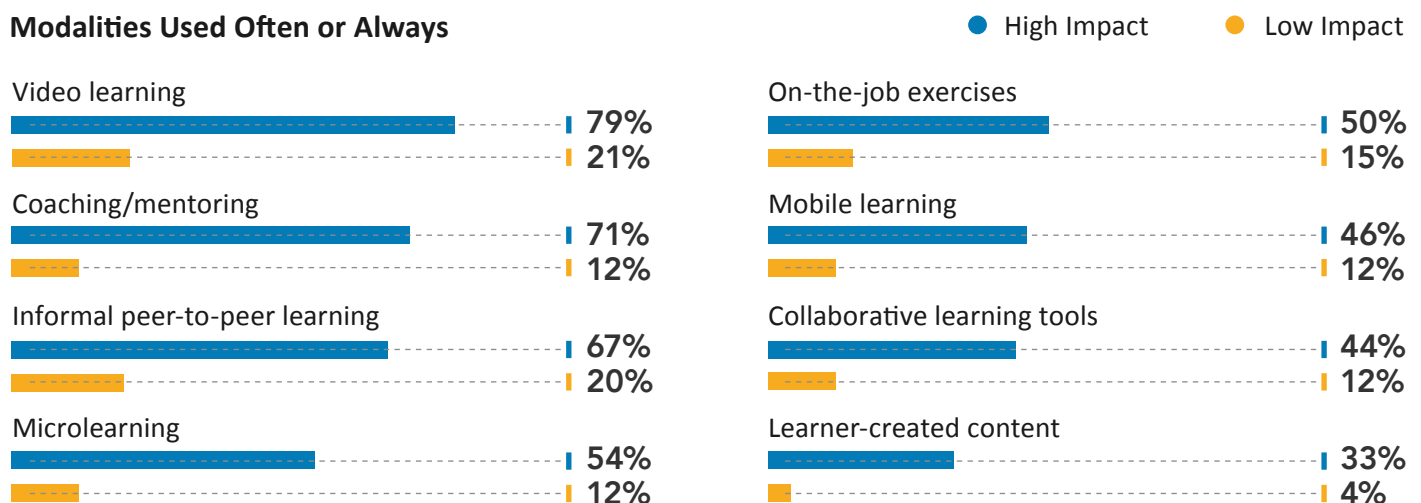
As time passed, companies began to recognize the futility of this approach, and the blanket use of web conferencing and VILT tapered off as a wider array of digital modalities were employed. This can be seen by comparing data from April 2020 to data from July 2020 about what tools companies were turning to.

"Go-To" ILT Alternatives

● April ● July

Webinars
- 86%
- 63%

Conference calls
- 81%
- 47%

VILT
- 67%
- 34%

Video
- 38%
- 71%

eLearning
- 37%
- 71%

Collaborative learning tools
- 29%
- 44%

Microlearning
- 22%
- 42%

Podcasts
- 19%
- 33%

Games/simulations
- 3%
- 17%

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Transitioning to the New Realities of the COVID-19 Experience

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These digital tools are not just about replacing ILT, though. These modalities are effective and impactful in their own right and should be part of the overall mix of learning, even if companies foresee a return to in-person learning. It has become critical that the tools companies are using for learning are flexible and collaborative in nature, to reflect the new ways in which people are working together. Brandon Hall Group's *Learning Experience Study* found that companies where learning is having a strong positive impact on specific outcomes are far more likely to be using these kinds of learning tools.

Modalities Used Often or Always

● High Impact ● Low Impact

Video learning
- 79%
- 21%

Coaching/mentoring
- 71%
- 12%

Informal peer-to-peer learning
- 67%
- 20%

Microlearning
- 54%
- 12%

On-the-job exercises
- 50%
- 15%

Mobile learning
- 46%
- 12%

Collaborative learning tools
- 44%
- 12%

Learner-created content
- 33%
- 4%

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Experience Study

These companies where learning is having a strong impact on outcomes are more than three times as likely to use collaborative learning tools and even more likely to enable learner created content than other organizations. Now that companies are recognizing the various digital modalities available to them, the critical piece becomes how to use them properly. They don't all apply to every situation, and in most cases, they need to be deployed in conjunction with one another, with one experience building off another and another reinforcing that. A good rule of thumb to keep in the back of your mind is the 70:20:10 model. Although it's more than 20 years old, the model which states that about 70% of what people learn comes from experiential learning, 20% from informal learning, and 10% from formal, is a solid foundation to work from. It is critical, however, to recognize the model as a guide, not a math exercise.

Creating the right learning environments is as much an art as it is a science.

The experience you use should be built for a specific purpose. By considering the subject matter, the audience, the intended outcomes and the timeframe required to achieve those outcomes, you can put together a framework for which modalities to use and when. Here are some of the parameters that can affect a learning program:

TRAINING TYPES

- Compliance
- Sales
- Soft skills
- Leadership development
- Process training
- New role transition
- Onboarding

CONTENT PARAMETERS

- Maintainability
- Compatibility
- Usability
- Modularity
- Scalability
- Standardization
- Time

AUDIENCE PROFILE

- Existing knowledge level
- Technology friendly (Yes/No)
- Level (Frontline/ Managers/Leadership)
- Work profile (desk job/ traveling)
- Age
- Location (consolidated/ disparate)

There is no guaranteed formula for success. What might work in one organization might not work in another. Each program within an organization will have different parameters. The key is to build a framework from which to start and make adjustments based on outcomes. Each successful program can serve as a foundation for future ones.

Of course, this all means ensuring the right technology is in place to execute on the strategy. It is critical to have tools to author the content into the right format or a relationship with a provider who can build it for you. There also must be technology to manage and deliver that content and a way to track and measure all of the interactions and outcomes. For some organizations, this can be found in one solution. For others, it will be an ecosystem of various platforms working together. In any case, building out the framework and the strategy will help determine what technology environment will work best and whether new solutions need to be acquired.

Key Considerations

When putting together a digital learning strategy, it is critical to remember that it is not an "either/or" proposition, but rather "either/and." These solutions can and do work well together and complement each other. So, it never has to be the use of one tool at the expense of another. Here are some other key considerations for moving forward:

1

Focus on a blend of modalities that allows for more flexibility

2

Allow as much room for collaboration as possible

3

Be sure to align the approach with the key factors:

- **Audience** — What are their preferences/ requirements?

- **Content** — What modality is the content best suited for?

- **Time** — Should elements of the program be synchronous or asynchronous?

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