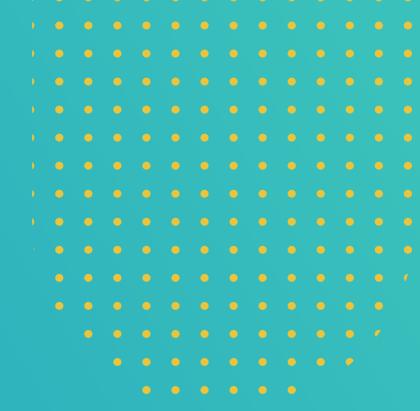




## Learning in the times of distributed everything

Research report with actionable insights on effective employee skilling & development





#### people matters

Millennium Plaza, 503-505, 5th Floor, Tower A, Sushant Lok Phase I, Sector 27, Gurugram, Haryana 122009

www.peoplematters.in



Punakar Complex, Survey No-117, Bangalore Pune Highway, Warje, Pune, India

www.upsidelms.com

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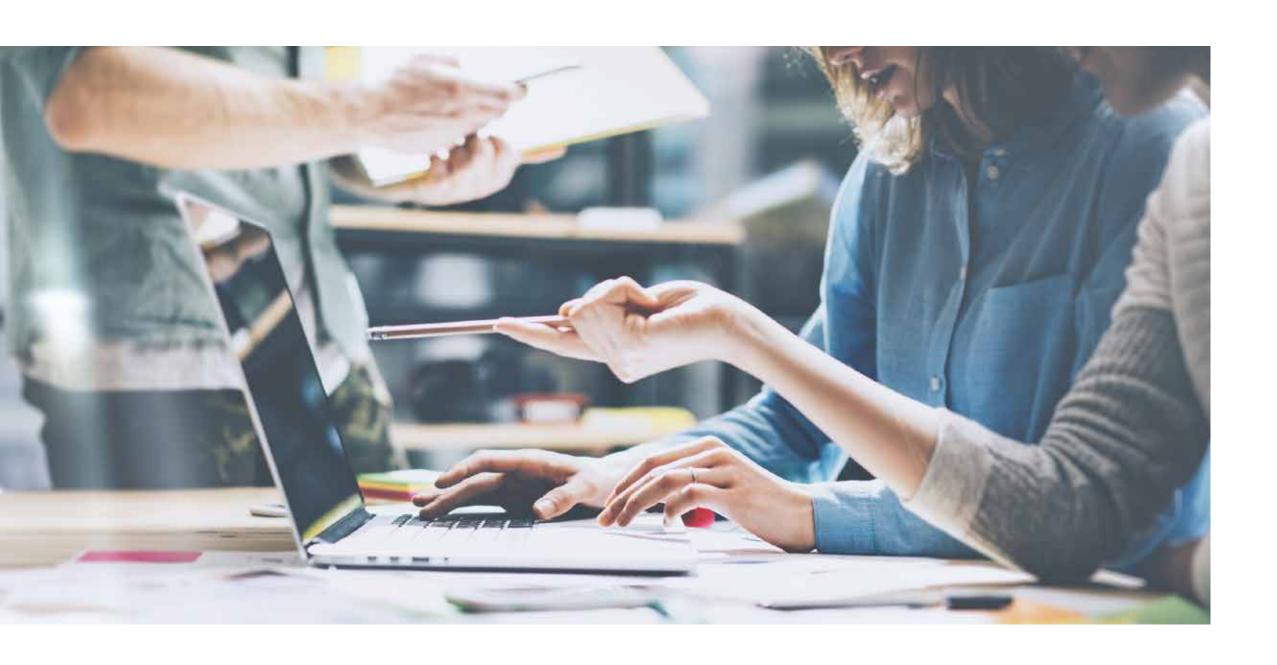
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impactful learning experience?

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## TACKLING FUTURE DISRUPTIONS-INVESTMENT IN SKILLING IS A MUST-HAVE

In 2019, the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work stated, "Today's skills will not match the jobs of tomorrow, and newly acquired skills may quickly become obsolete." CEOs and leaders around the world took the suggestion seriously and started investing in their employees' training:





PwC: invested \$3 BN into job training for all of its 275,000 employees over the next 3-4 years. That amounts to \$3,636-\$2,727 per employee annually, depending on the final timeline



Amazon: invested \$700 MN to retrain a third of its US workforce by 2025

### accenture

Accenture: re-skilled nearly 300,000 of their total body of 469,000 employees and are investing in skilling \$1 BN annually

In recent years, skilling has become one of the top priorities for a number of CEOs, which according to a Wall Street report, had always been among the least of them. This has necessitated CHROs to relook at their overall L&D function and strategy. In order to respond to the market dynamics, changing priorities, and vision of the company and CEOs, CHROs need to accelerate investment in continuous learning and learning technologies to advance talent development across the business.

However, the global pandemic changed everything. Right now, talent leaders are faced with a three-fold situation:

01

Employees are anxious about the future—fewer than four in 10 feel very confident that they will be able to continue to meet the requirements of their job successfully.

02

For employers, cost-cutting is a 'moment of truth' that cannot be avoided

03

For talent leaders, delivering an engaging and impactful learning experience in the times of "distributed everything" is a challenge

The coronavirus pandemic has made it even more urgent for companies to double down on their learning budgets and commit to reskilling. Developing this muscle will also strengthen companies for future disruptions.

To find answers to some of the most acute questions around delivering learning in the times of crisis and "distributed everything", People Matters in partnership with UpsideLMS brings to you a report on 'Learning in the times of Distributed Everything, 2020'. Here are some pertinent questions that this report seeks answers to:

- Should corporations take the responsibility of reskilling employees and prioritize their development in the times of crisis?
- What are the current barriers to effective L&D with respect to the distributed workforce (especially brought about 'suddenly' by COVID-19)?
- Why technology is a table stake when it comes to creating an impactful learning culture in times of crisis?
- How can organizations future-proof employees for the new world of work - today?

# DURING THIS TIME OF CRISIS HOW ARE LEADERS THINKING

As of May 27, 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 94 percent of the global workforce lives in countries with active workplace closure measures. Businesses across a range of sectors are facing catastrophic losses, resulting in millions of workers vulnerable to layoffs.

Meanwhile, the past few months have also seen a rapid acceleration of three major forces: deglobalization, digitization, and corporate consolidation. With consumer habits shifting rapidly to online consumption, businesses have had to respond quickly with "digital transformation" plans in months instead of years. Inline, one popular Internet meme singled out COVID-19 as the member of the C-suite responsible for digital transformation, as opposed to the chief digital or chief executive officer.

This is a unique scenario — millions unemployed on the one hand, and rapidly evolving and growing skills needs on the other. There is an opportunity for the latter to solve the former's problem. According to our research, when we asked talent leaders on their top three business priorities, we found:

65%

Preparing for growth amid increased uncertainty

55%

Managing business continuity and driving people agenda due to COVID-19

42%

Aligning with the pace of innovation/disruption impacting the business

These three priorities as mentioned above by the participating companies suggest that to navigate through the ongoing crisis and turn the business challenge into opportunities, organizations would have to shift their agenda towards skilling and people development.

But what do talent leaders feel about the importance of increased focus on employees' learning and development, now when the businesses are coping up with the sudden pandemic?

58 percent of the talent leaders who participated in the survey said that skills and capability building is very critical to navigate through the pandemic.

On a scale of 1-5, how do you rate the importance of skilling and capability building during the ongoing pandemic? (1 - Not important at all, 5 - Very important)

Responses	
	<b>— 58</b> %
	<b>— 34</b> %
	<b>— 7</b> %
	<b>— 1</b> %
	Responses

# THE JOURNEY OF DELIVERING LEARNING IS NOT ALL THAT EASY!



While we saw that leadership acknowledges the importance of investment in skilling, however, challenges in delivering an impactful learning program still persist, and the journey is not at all easy. In our research, "Learning in the times of distributed everything," we found that 77 percent of the surveyed companies shared that work from home scenarios has impacted the way they delivered learning to employees.

Dr. Madana Kumar, Vice President and Global Head Leadership Development, UST Global shares, "The
disruption came in two fronts. In the blink of an eyelid, the
in-person programs that we used to run for immersive
learning became an impossibility. Quick redesign of the
programs to adapt to the "virtual working" and hence
virtual learning was the first challenge we had to face. The
second challenge arose out of the overall climate of
uncertainty that suddenly descended on the organisation
as a whole. How to keep the learning going when
everything else was "locked down" was the question we
had to grapple with."

Further, what made delivering learning challenging in times of virtual working were:

### 60%

#### **Delivering engaging and experiential learning**

With the onset of pandemic, companies around the world, hastily transitioned to virtual models of learning delivery. However, this also took a toll on engagement and experience of learners.

### 47%

#### **Tracking employee performance**

As millions of employees in India work remotely during the coronavirus pandemic, managers unaccustomed to supervising employees from afar face challenges in evaluating and tracking their performance.

### 43%

#### Difficulty to create a unified learning culture

Given the fact that work from home became a new normal leading to a distributed workforce, organizations required a rewriting of the learning culture which was tailored to the ongoing ways of working, which is continuous, and unified across the level. Sharing one of the best practices from DR. Reddy's, Swatee Sarangees, Global Head -Learning, Leadership & Organization Development, shares experience and engagement of learners should be at the core of learning programs. She further shares, "At Dr. Reddy's, the endeavour is to provide a "Netflix of Learning' with multiple resources and empower learners to own their learning journey. Our LXP platform is geared at providing an end-to-end enriched and seamless learning experience whether people are working in offices, sites or homes. We will strive to provide learning resources which are adequate, integrated, engaging and relevant to build capabilities. The future of learning is more challenging yet promising at the same time."

## TECHNOLOGY- A TABLE STAKE TO OFFER AN IMPACTFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

When we conducted the survey, in May, it was too early to say how COVID-19 will ultimately affect the accelerated adoption of digital learning. However, when we analyzed the tech adoption scenario, we found that for about 15 percent of the surveyed companies, more than 75 percent of the total training time is being spent on tech-enabled L&D activities . This marked an increase in tech activity by almost 12 percent before COVID-19, which is a matter of about six months.

Further, being asked if this investment in digital learning technology is until employees restrict to virtual workplaces or goes beyond that, 20 percent of organizations said that they plan to have over 75 percent of their L&D activities enabled by technology post COVID, which is a jump by 17 percent in tech related investment in learning.

What percent of total training time, distributed workforce spent on tech-enabled L&D activities?

Time	Before COVID-19	During COVID-19	After COVID-19
Less than 10%	53%	28%	13%
10-50%	38%	40%	36%
50-75%	<b>7%</b>	18%	31%
More than 75%	2%	14%	20%

Delving deeper into the current state of the L&D tech for a distributed workforce, it was found that most organizations (47 percent) deliver learning through a mix of in-house technologies and technologies being procured by the vendors.

It was also clear that technology is a table stake when it comes to delivering an impactful learning program to a distributed workforce, especially in the current times. Webinars are gaining popularity with 81 percent companies adopting webinars as a method of delivering learning, followed by Virtual Classrooms (71%) and MOOCs (51%).

P.B Kotur, Head - Global Freshers Engagement Program at Wipro, reflected on the company's optimism in technology in delivering a great learning experience. He shares, "At Wipro, we have all learning systems in place to provide the required skills and competence for our workforce – be it freshers or senior folks. Anybody having a laptop or a desktop or a smartphone can access the prescribed or aspiring learning modules at their "will" and at their place. We increased the Self-directed learning, Virtual Instructor Led Training, Role Specific training and Crowd sourced learning and project implementations. Even prior to the pandemic, all our training programs were available online. We also have a robust crowdsourcing platform wherein learners get access to virtual development environments to get hands-on experience on programming assignments as well as live projects. We were able to scale up the usage post pandemic."

#### What best describes your L&D tech for a distributed workforce?

47%

Have some L&D technologies built in-house and some have been procured from vendors 21%

Have built an integrated L&D technology system in-house

13% •

Have multiple L&D technologies procured from multiple vendors

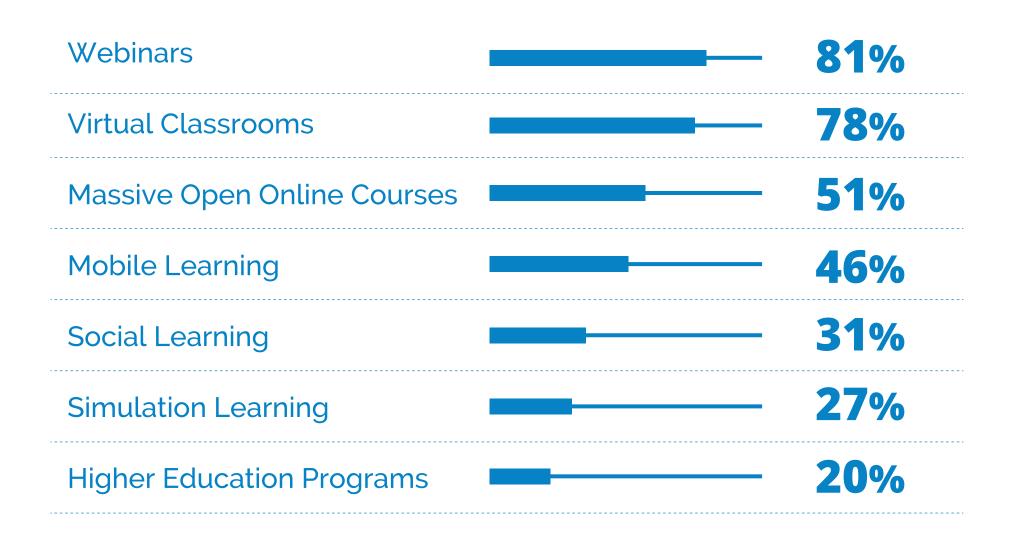
11% •

Have an integrated system from one partner

8%

Have outsourced the L&D technology infrastructure to a third party

## What are the various modes of learning available for distributed workforce?



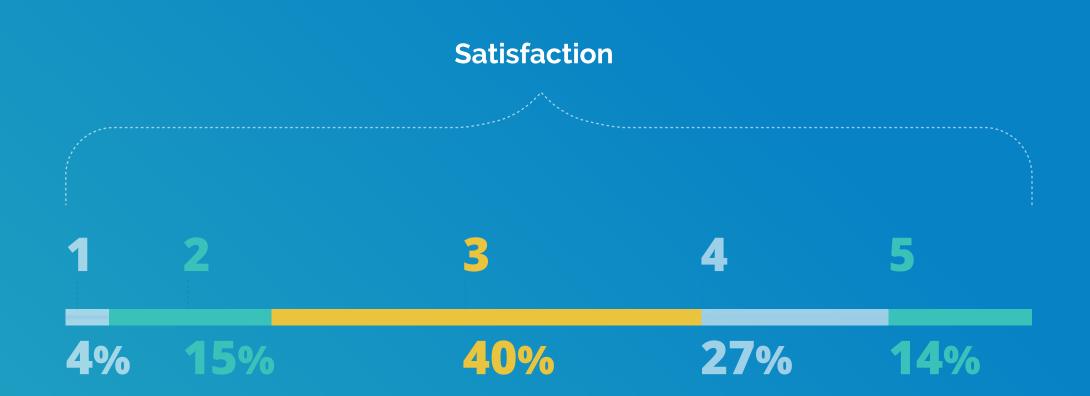
## GETTING ROI FROM LEARNING TECH

While Indian organizations show great optimism in adopting and embracing learning technologies, only 15 percent organizations are completely satisfied with the outcomes from tech. The most common challenge with learning tech, as reported while conducting the study, was found to be limited tracking and reporting (45 percent), followed by quality of courses available (39 percent), and implementation challenges (36 percent).

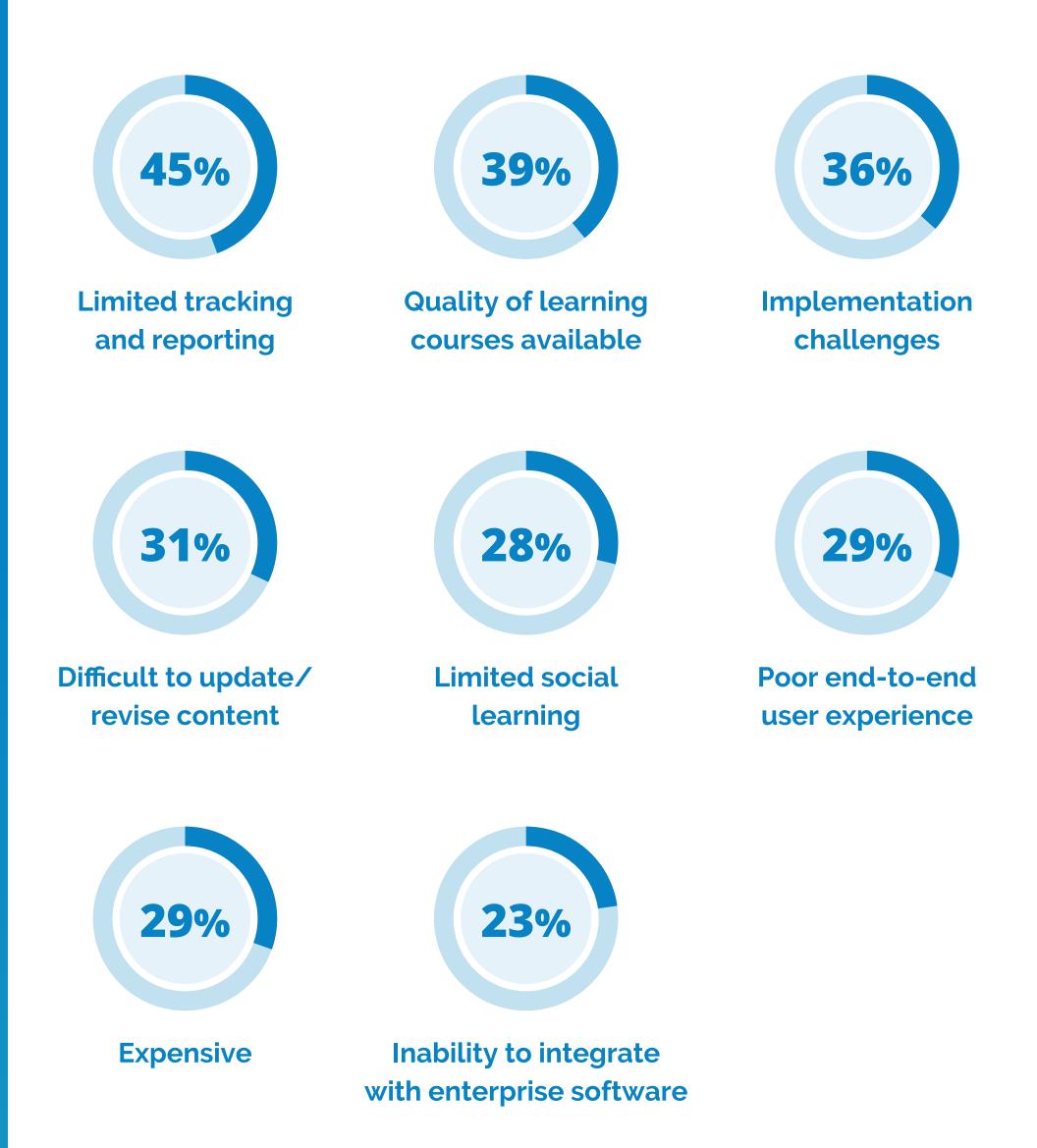
Speaking about the challenges with learning technology, Amit Gautam, CEO of UpideLMS, said, "Learning technology has been evolving in leaps and bounds over the last decade. The LMS, in particular, has grown from a rudimentary, clunky system that was largely admin-driven to a AI-powered learner-first platform that enables continuous learning in the flow of work. However, the rate of adoption has been rather sluggish owing to the speed-to-respond to changing user behavior, the organization culture and prioritizing of people development agenda in the Indian workplace. But that is changing now too as the digital transformation brought about by COVID-19 compelled organizations to embrace learning technologies in all forms and types without an exception, while on the other side of the table, it prodded learn-tech providers to up their game and expand their offerings and product features."

Elaborating further, he added, "The new-age learning platforms don't just track and monitor training interventions but provide a deep-dive analytics into usage, completions etc. that aid intelligent decision-making, while their API and Integration ability facilitates bundling with enterprise software so as to create an unified suite for learning and working. This includes integration with online content marketplaces and support for all types of content/content libraries that ensures a comprehensive repository of relevant, related, engaging quality content that's available to the learners at their fingertips. Most learning platforms are now equipped with Artificial Intelligence (AI), in the form of a recommendation engine, that continuously learns from user behavior and 'suggests' the right content thereby creating an individualized learning path for the learner. Last but not the least, support for Social Learning and Knowledge Collaboration enables informal learning and communication between learners (anytime, anyplace too - through Mobile Apps), while their Cloud-based (SaaS) architecture makes the deployment and implementation hassle-free."

On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the learning technology employed for skilling distributed workforce? (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)

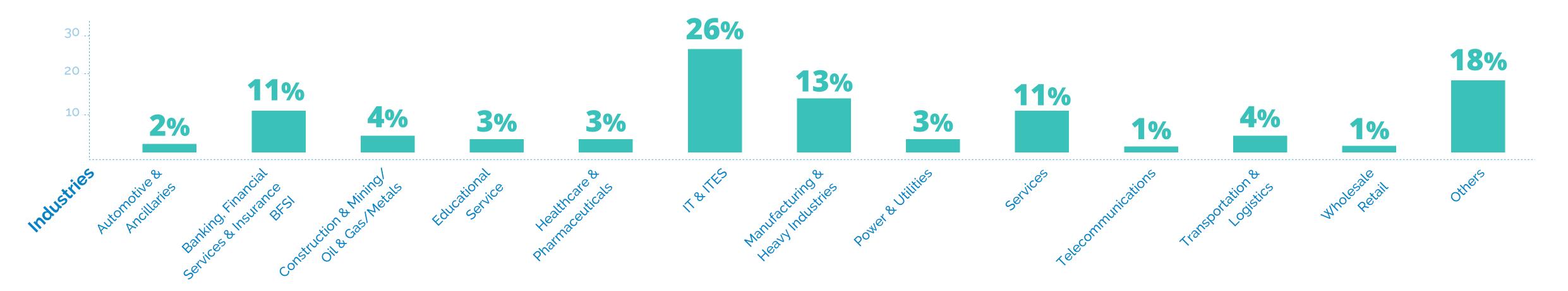


What are the challenges that you are facing with L&D technologies to develop distributed talent?



## **APPENDIX**

The research, Learning in the times of distributed everything saw participation of 137 unique companies across different industries:



Further these 137 organizations that participated in the survey, according to the employee size, can be categorized as:

<b>Employee Size</b>	
Less than 1,000	53%
1,001 - 3,000	15%
3,001 - 5,000	<b>7</b> %
5,001 - 10,000	8%
10,001 - 20,000	7%
Greater than 20,000	10%



## Future-proofing talent:

Case Studies from the companies which are doing the "right way"













## EXPERIENCE, ENABLEMENT, & ENGAGEMENT:



Dr. Madana Kumar
Vice President and Global Head Leadership Development,
UST Global



For L&D, the disruption came in two fronts. In the blink of an eyelid, the in-person programs that we used to run for immersive learning became an impossibility. Quick redesign of the programs to adapt to the "virtual working" and hence virtual learning was the first challenge we had to face. The second challenge arose out of the overall climate of uncertainty that suddenly descended on the organisation as a whole. How to keep the learning going when everything else was "locked down" was the question we had to grapple with. The third challenge came from the obvious front. With the organisation having to preserve its cash flow and having to cut costs, how to prevent it from impacting the overall learning in a negative way was a real challenge that we faced.

#### **Lessons from the pandemic**

Be ready with a Plan B always. Business continuity planning (BCP) used to be a buzzword post the 9/11 days. COVID has once again proven that BCP is not a fad and organisations need to be able to put it into practice any time. Being at the forefront of technology, we were able to

adapt to the situation very fast and the transition was smooth. This has also highlighted our approach "We do not have the luxury of taking time off to learn anymore, but we have to learn all the time". It is really heartening to see that learning picked up speed during the lockdown. This is a testimony to our strategy and preparedness.

## Elements of L&D planning and strategy had to be re-looked at the time of the pandemic outbreak

Our strategy was based on Experience, Engagement, Enablement. Hence the platform was always a means to achieve the strategy. Hence we didn't have to relook at the strategy so much as how to meet those three requisites in a virtual environment. This made our task a lot easier. We stuck on to our strategy of providing our learners with a great experience, keeping them engaged, and ensuring that they are enabled for significance in whatever they do for themselves and for the business. Transition requirement was only for shifting the mode of delivery from the in-person mode to the virtual mode.

## Tackling learning of the 'NOW' distributed workforce

We already had a very healthy mix of blended learning with the in-person learning contributing to less than 30 percent of the total learning hours. So we had a head-start as far as continuing the learning in a WFH and distributed environment. Much of our learning was already using digital means. On the contrary, we ran campaigns to ensure that "Learning is not locked down". This resulted in significant pick up in learning during the WFH stage.

## Technology as a table stake for impactful learning culture

This has been a necessity for some time now. This is part of the Digital Transformation that the entire world in general, and businesses in particular has been going through. WE have to leverage technology to make the learning delivery more engaging, to give the learners a much better learning experience and to enable them for a

digital future. As you can see in our learning strategy, these were part of our core strategy much before COVID. What COVID has done is to accelerate the transformation and it is a very welcome development. Tech-enabled learning will continue to progress, no matter what the "new normal" looks like, post this pandemic.

## Skilling programs deployed to get the workforce to speed up with the new normal

All our technology upskilling programs were already fully adapted to the new normal. However, we did have to take care of several soft issues, like loss of emotional connect, a perceptible "loss of control" from leaders who were used to the traditional leading methodology etc. These were dealt with promptly through tech-enabled learning sessions. Fortunately again, we had already adopted Servant Leadership as the overarching leadership philosophy all through the organisation and that helped significantly in keeping the employees feel valued and motivated through the difficult times.



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# ANYTIME, ANYWHERE & ANY DEVICE



PB Kotur

Head - Global Freshers

Engagement Program,

Wipro



While there have been discussions around managing the performance, productivity and learning of employees in the times of remote working, we observed a completely different scenario. We saw about a 40 percent increase in training completions by employees during the first three months of lockdown. In fact, we were able to drive all our online programs and sessions across employees and engage them well.

We, as a technology organization, it was not so difficult for us to transition into a seamless learning environment for employees. About 80 percent of our workforce has been leveraging our anytime, anywhere, any device learning for many years. When these employees started WFH, they continued with remote learning seamlessly. Our training programs for freshers used to be a mix of Pre-Joining online training and Instructor Led Training (ILT) once they joined the organization. However, as the degree completion for freshers has been delayed by the universities, we leveraged the additional time to move most of the ILT training to online mode and prepare the campus recruits before they join the organization. This would help us save some of the lost time due to delayed joining.

#### Tackling learning of the 'NOW' distributed workforce

At Wipro, we have all learning systems in place to provide the required skills and competence for our workforce – be it freshers or senior folks. Anybody having a laptop or a desktop or a smartphone can access the prescribed or aspiring learning modules at their "will" and at their place. We increased the Self-directed learning, Virtual Instructor Led Training, Role Specific training and Crowd sourced learning and project implementations. Even prior to the pandemic all our training programs were available online. We also have a robust crowdsourcing platform wherein learners get access to virtual development environments to get hands-on experience on programming assignments as well as live projects. We were able to scale up the usage post pandemic.

## Skilling programs deployed to get the workforce to speed up with the new normal

As part of the career journey for employees, we have "Skill Family" for each business requirement. An employee has to gain the skills defined in each Skill family with hands-on experience, which makes the employees not only project-ready but also customer ready. The Skill Family also emphasizes on Level of Expertise (For example, L1, L2, L3 etc). Technology Skills, Behavioural Skills, Project Management Skills, Techno-Functional / Consulting Skills, Architecting Skills and Delivery Leadership Skills are provided to our workforce towards making our customer successful.

## BELIEVE, BECOME, & BELONG



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Swatee Sarangi
Global Head Learning, Leadership &
Organization Development,
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories



 The Covid-19 Pandemic has proven to be one of the most unprecedented happenings to be experienced across the world. The pace and impact of this change has been incessant and profound. One of the key challenges all through this has been working and moving ahead in the fog of uncertainty and translating crisis into opportunities.

"For us, at Dr Reddy's, it was striving for business continuity and even leveraging digital technology in order to embrace the 'New Normal'." With Dynamism and Empathy at the heart of everything we do, ensuring the physical safety and mental wellbeing of our people was a top priority. We were also steadfast on our commitment towards continuous learning. Physical classroom sessions made way for virtual ones, series of learning webinars organized, and multitude of learning resources provided. Refuting the old adage 'Change takes time', navigating through the pandemic we promptly encouraged people to acquire and sharpen life and work skills. In order to take to the new normal, our learning interventions were around the themes of Care for Self, Others and Business.

#### **Lessons from the pandemic**

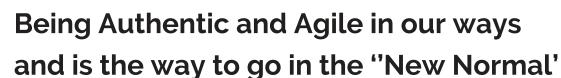
Accessing learning contents from anytime, anywhere, any device is no longer a buzz. What matters most is how well we design our security measures around learning and development for the WFH workforce. Enhanced learner experience through microlearning modules, mentor networks, sentiment surveys for those WFH, keeping an inspired workforce during pandemic and continuous collaboration and conversation with them would make remote learning and competency development a great experience. During the pandemic period we actually saw that the engagement levels by employees on training programs went up significantly. This dispelled all apprehensions about eLearning/online programs and we observed effective adoption by employees.

Developing a mindset and skill set hinged on growth and entrepreneurship is surely most imperative for future proofing organizations. The lessons from COVID -19 is to focus on enabling people to be resilient and courageous in times of crisis. Providing an authentic culture goes a long

way in nurturing trust and spirit of collaboration where people thrive and flourish. This helps them take accountability and embrace risks and uncertainties with competence and confidence.

Agility is also proving out to be a 'Great Equalizer' for organizations of every size and type across the globe. Learning the way we digitize and digitalize the way we learn will help in triggering creativity and innovation in existing business processes and exploring new business models.

The biggest learnings often come in reflecting upon the toughest times, few things stand out for me:







## Elements of L&D planning and strategy had to be re-looked at the time of the pandemic outbreak

Shifting the hands of the clock to now be more in sync with digital resources, one of our major strategies in fostering continual learning even in the time of pandemic was propelled on providing learning ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, ANY DEVICE. For us, it was reinforcing the learner at the centre in our learning development plans. Introducing Virtual Classrooms and extensive use of digital enabled platforms to share learnings and reflections was a change that we incorporated right in the initial days of lockdown.

We augmented our strategies to ensure that learning in such turbulent times was holistic with the right blend of knowledge, skills and competencies. While we honed hard skills, we also focused on softer ones that enabled people to stay positive and motivated.

These transitions were a result of harnessing learning through Believe (Providing Power and Purpose to the learner to choose), Become (Learn and Grow through skill enhancement and overall well being) and Belong (inculcating a sense of community through sharing of learning stories and reflections).

#### Tackling learning of the 'NOW' distributed workforce

With the intent of making our workforce equipped with futuristic skills, having the learners distributed and not confined to a physical classroom was not much of a barrier. Our people in plants, offices, fields and homes alike showcased a huge appetite for learning and adapted so quickly and so well to the new settings that we witnessed a surge in number of participations, more than we expected, for learning modules, webinars, podcasts or interactive sessions with leaders. Learning was lapped up with keen energy and enthusiasm. Learning sessions on a wide array of themes through virtual formats by associating with some renowned speakers and top-ranking universities across the globe augured well. We have shifted focus to simulated, gamified and social ways of learning. Amongst the several initiatives, I would like to share an interesting one that we ran called 'Learning Stories – In the times of COVID-19' which was a huge draw, it was amazing to see how people shared their learning moments and stories during this pandemic.

#### Trends in tech-enabled learning

Skills surely are the new currency. Digital Learning Interventions have also catalysed the democratization of learning by providing access to content that had previously been limited to face-to-face. They have been instrumental in making the transition from courses for few to resources for all.

One of the most emerging and growing trends that I foresee supporting tech-enabled learning is Phygital (Digital Platform + Physical Experience). An Augmented Reality enabled platform to provide the learner an ace experience at par with physical training at the ease of sitting in front of a screen. Today, AI, ML and Augmented Reality are providing umpteen opportunities in the space of learning, transforming the whole experience and format, is here to stay!

## Skilling programs deployed to get the workforce to speed up with the new normal

As a part of our Digital Transformation journey, we introduced an initiative 'Digital Ninja' for building digital hyper awareness by encouraging all people to absorb in capabilities around Digital, Data and Design by enrolling for certificate courses. This will help the workforce to get on with the new normal with ease. Besides, we will also be building digital capabilities in specific roles and functions.

For the soft skills, we organized sessions on themes such as leading in uncertain times, resilience, wellbeing in a post Covid-19 world and Art of storytelling to engage and enroll people.

The Safety and Wellbeing of our employees has been paramount. Along with Skill Focused interventions, we also undertook initiatives of getting our people Covid-19 Certified, encompassing all aspects of physical and mental wellbeing. All through, our leaders walked the talk and provided unstinted support and motivation to their teams – these also served as lifelong lessons from role models imparted by true spirit of empathy and humility.

#### people matters

### **About People Matters**

People Matters is Asia's largest and world's fastest growing digital media and community platform in the arena of people and work. With over 300K community members we bring the talent fraternity abreast with new ideas, trends, technological innovations, expert viewpoints and new pathways that raise its collective consciousness and help in finding all the answers pertinent to people and work.



### **About UpsideLMS**

UpsideLMS is a leading global provider of workplace learning technology solutions. Backed by over 15 years of experience and 50+ industry awards and recognitions, it is trusted by 250+ organizations and over 1.5M learners worldwide.

UpsideLMS' portfolio of solutions includes:

**UpsideLMS** – An Al-powered, cloud-based, full-featured Learning Management System with support for Online, Offline (No Internet), Formal, Social/Informal and Mobile Learning.

**Plethora** - A comprehensive library of ready-to-use eLearning, mLearning, micro-learning videos and courses on competencies ranging from soft skills to compliance to technical.

UpsideLMS powers Zydus, L&T, Gulf Oil, Bridgestone, Strides Pharma, TISS - iCall, ISS, Doha Bank amongst other leading blue-chip companies for their training management.



### **Research Team**

Amit Gautam

CEO,

UpsideLMS

#### Anushree Sharma

Assistant Manager -Content, People Matters

### Pranjalee Lahri

AVP Marketing, UpsideLMS

### Reshma S Nair

Manager - Brand Reachout, People Matters