

YOUR GUIDE TO:

THE MODERN LEARNER



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The way we learn has evolved significantly over time. The modern learner has had to adjust accordingly in order to keep pace. Shaped by the digital age, these individuals have unique learning characteristics, preferences, and behaviours.

Why do we seek to understand the modern learner? Well, it's for the same reason we use learner personas. By understanding your learners' needs and desires, we can create more effective and engaging learning experiences, while simultaneously future-proofing our approach.

Getting a handle on this complex and ever-evolving group is difficult. And generalisations are dangerous. But fret not. By analysing research and data, we've successfully identified the key characteristics that define this generation of learners.

In the next section of this guidebook, we identify seven of these key characteristics, examine the impact of technology, and establish modern learners' unique learning preferences. Are you ready to get to know your learners on a deeper level? Then let's begin!

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DEFINING THE MODERN LEARNER

While individual learners vary, certain trends are evident among groups of modern learners. The following characteristics, supported by research and survey data, define this new generation of learners.

MOBILE MINDED

70% of students are more motivated by mobile learning experiences.

DIGITAL DYNAMOS

Millennials and Gen Z will make up **58%** of the workforce by 2029.

IMPULSIVE INDULGERS

50% of survey respondents agree they have become less patient over the past five years.

MULTITASKING MASTERS

72% of learners have been forced to turn to multitasking as a coping mechanism.

AUTONOMOUS AGENTS

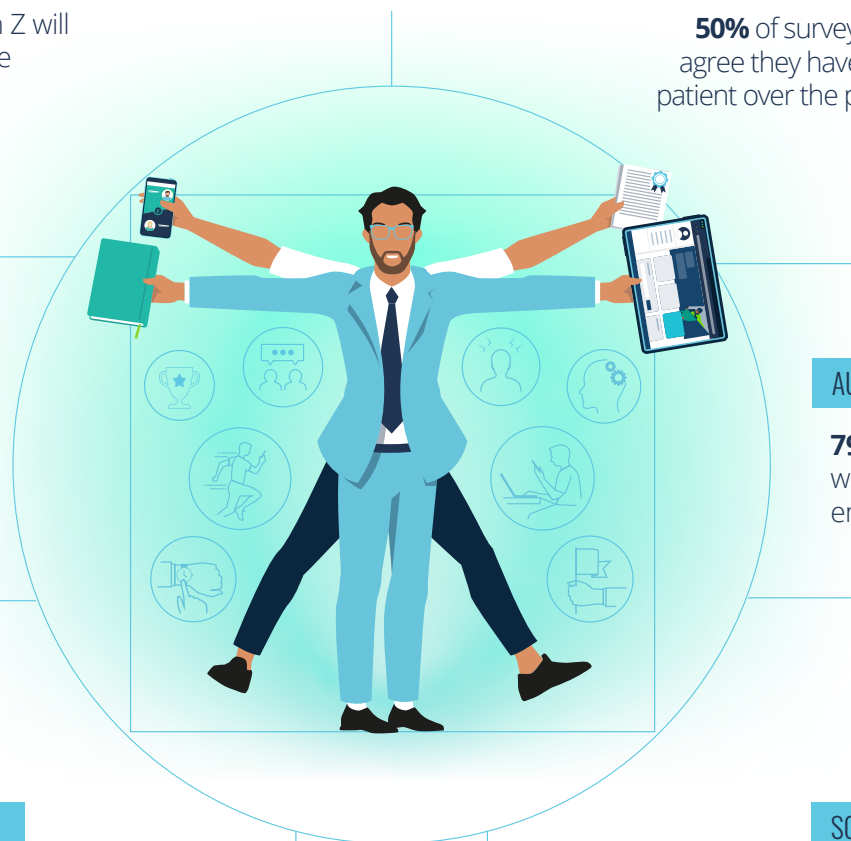
79% of autonomous workers report higher engagement levels.

DEEPLY DISTRACTED

The average employee loses **720** work hours every year due to distractions.

SOCIAL SAVANTS

84.6% of learners prefer social learning tools to be used in their training.



THE 7 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN LEARNERS

1. Digital Natives:

The majority of modern learners are digital natives. This means they grew up in the digital age, surrounded by a variety of technology. In turn, they're comfortable with computers, the internet, and other digital devices.



According to CNBC, millennials and Gen Z will make up 58% of the workforce by 2029. While the term 'digital natives' is usually associated with these younger generations, we prefer a softer definition. If you're tech-savvy and open to embracing new digital tools, then you likely fit the bill.

This open-minded approach means that digital natives are well-equipped to adopt new software solutions and adapt to technological advancements. This is a real advantage in today's job market where 92% of roles require digital skills.

It also means that modern learners won't be put off by the idea of online learning. Perhaps this explains why 77% of learners prefer eLearning to classroom learning.

2. Multitaskers:

Modern learners are professional plate-spinners, both in their personal and professional lives. This has led to a rise in multitasking, as individuals strive to balance work, family, and social commitments. Indeed, if any of the following apply, *you* might be a multitasker:



- You answer emails and messages during meetings or lectures.
- You watch videos or listen to music while reading or writing.
- Your internet browser has more than 8 tabs open.
- You can't eat a meal without simultaneously watching TV or online media.
- You use cooking or walking as an opportunity to make phone calls.

And so on. The fact is, modern life is busy, and we're all just trying to make it work. As it happens, a staggering 55% of employees feel overwhelmed by their workload, and 61% report feeling exhausted by the end of the working day.

This relentless pressure has an impact. 72% of employees have been forced to turn to multitasking as a coping mechanism.

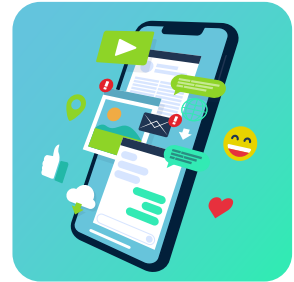
This is despite the fact that only 2.5% of us are true 'supertaskers'. In reality, multitasking can reduce individual performance by as much as 15%.

Given modern learners' busy schedules, it's no surprise that Josh Bersin estimates the average employee only has 24 minutes per week for formal learning. Even then, it's likely that this time is divided between multiple tasks.

3. Shorter Attention Spans

Our propensity for multitasking has also made us more susceptible to distractions.

This is what's known as attention fatigue. This challenge is exacerbated by the sheer number of distractions we have to contend with in the modern age. For instance:



- The average smartphone user gets 46 push notifications per day.
- In turn, we check our phones 144 times per day.
- The average person receives 120 emails per day.
- Adults living in metropolitan areas see between 50-400 adverts per day.

Indeed, research suggests that employees lose 720 work hours every year due to distractions. That's 96 full working days. Yikes. Unfortunately, this also plays havoc with our attention spans.

Now, you may have heard the myth that our attention span has dwindled to a meagre 8 seconds, making us less focused than a goldfish. This piece of misinformation stems from a misinterpretation of data within a Microsoft study.

Unfortunately, reality doesn't paint a much better picture. According to researchers from the University of California and Microsoft, our attention spans have plummeted from 150 seconds in 2004 to a mere 47 seconds today.

This means you now have less than a minute to engage the modern learner. Tick tock!

4. Instant Gratification Seekers

Living in the digital age, it's hard not to get accustomed to the convenience of instant gratification. After all, so much is available to us at a click of a button. For instance, we now have instant access to a rich and diverse information economy through the internet.



But, this is just the tip of the iceberg. We can instantly stream virtually any movie, TV show, or sporting event.

We can have takeout delivered to our door in under 30 minutes. And we can order almost anything online for next-day delivery. This sets a high bar for learning professionals to reach.

This instant gratification culture can lead to frustration when our needs aren't met immediately. In fact, 50% of survey respondents agree that they have become less patient in the past five years. What's more, according to Bic, we get frustrated after:

- 16 seconds of waiting for a web page to load.
- 22 seconds of waiting for a movie to stream.
- 28 seconds of waiting for a kettle to boil.

Personally, these wait times sound quite generous, especially when I'm in the mood for a cuppa. Of course, these expectations also have an impact on modern learning experiences. After all, we now expect instant answers to our questions and learning content designed for rapid consumption.

5. Self-Directed

Traditionally, learning has taken place within a pedagogical context. That means the experience is led by an authoritative teacher figure who guides the instructional process from start to finish. However, adult learning experiences don't have to follow this model.



Technological advancements, flexible learning options, and a growing sense of individualism (up 12% since 1960) have empowered learners to take more control over their learning journeys.

As a result, modern learners are more likely to proactively seek out information, set personal development goals, and choose their own learning methods. This approach, known as heutagogy, shifts the focus away from teacher-centred instruction to learner-driven exploration.

Funny things happen when you give your employees or learners the steering wheel. According to Effectory, 79% of highly autonomous workers report higher levels of engagement. In turn, autonomy has been shown to produce a 5.2% boost in productivity.

It's easy to imagine the impact this could have on your learners. For example, did you know that if you're genuinely curious about the answer to a question, you're 30% more likely to be able to recall it in the future.

6. Social Learning Lovers

While modern learners value self-direction and autonomy, they still crave a sense of community and belonging. Social learning provides us with an opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals, exchange knowledge, and gain a sense of purpose.



Social learning is the process of learning from our observations and interactions with others. It's an increasingly popular educational approach. In fact, 84.6% of students prefer social learning tools to be used in their learning experiences.

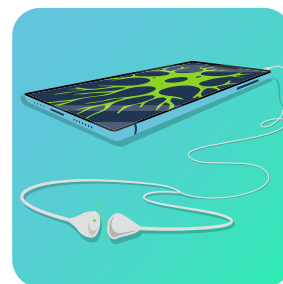
This means modern learners are likely to thrive in collaborative learning environments where they can engage in group discussions, projects, and assignments. Online forums and discussion boards can also be beneficial, as they provide opportunities for instant feedback.

Significantly, 87% of employees recognise the importance of knowledge sharing. In turn, 82% of executives believe that fostering a knowledge sharing culture helps to boost organisational innovation.

This is a well-founded belief. According to the ATD, social learning approaches have a 75:1 ROI ratio compared to formal web-based training. That's the kind of return you can't afford to ignore.

7. Mobile Ready

With 7.2 billion smartphones worldwide, nearly 90% of the global population now has a supercomputer in their pockets. In fact, the average person spends an astonishing 3 hours and 15 minutes on their phone every day.



That accounts for 20% of our waking hours.

So, it's fair to say that the modern learner is mobile ready. They're well accustomed to accessing information and completing tasks on their mobile devices. This is true when it comes to learning as well.

Just look at the popularity of educational apps like:

- Duolingo (500 million registered users in 2023)
- Brainly (400 million registered users in 2023)
- Coursera (128 million registered users in 2023)

And so on. It's estimated that there are over 389,000 educational apps in the App Store and Google Play Store. This helps to explain why 64% of students use mobile devices for instructional purposes. What's more, 70% of students are more motivated by mobile learning experiences.

It helps that this approach works really well. For instance, did you know that over half (55%) of business leaders report increased growth after implementing a mobile learning programme?



THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON MODERN LEARNERS

We can't truly understand the modern learner without acknowledging the profound impact that technology has had on them. After all, the breakneck pace of technological development has transformed the way we consume information and communicate with each other.

Here are four examples of this:

The Mobile Revolution

As we've already noted, smartphones have become an integral part of our lives. 87% of us reach for our devices within an hour of waking up, and then continue to check them every 12 minutes for the rest of the day. In fact, 33% of us would rather give up sex than our phones.



This has led to some interesting consequences. For instance, these devices promote an 'always-on' culture, blurring the lines between work and our personal lives. They've also helped modern learners to develop a preference for 'quick hit' content, visual media, and newer formats like vertical video.

The Influence of Social Media

With over 5.22 billion users worldwide (63.8% of the population), social media has become commonplace. In fact, the typical social media user spends an average of 2 hours and 19 minutes per day on these platforms.



While the main reason for using social media is to keep in touch with family and friends (51% agree), it has also become a valuable educational tool. For example, users now leverage these platforms to read news stories (34.4%), find content (30.4%), and conduct work-related research (22%).

This democratised approach to accessing information may even have contributed to modern learners' preference for self-directed learning.

The Rise of Online Learning

As with most other digital solutions, online learning continues to grow in popularity. In 1995, just 4% of organisations used online learning. Today, 90% incorporate eLearning in their training programmes. Similarly, online university courses and MOOCs continue to attract a healthy audience.

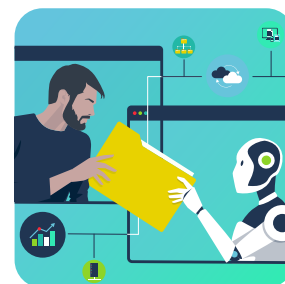


In turn, modern learners now understand that learning doesn't have to take place in a fixed location. Online learning breaks down geographical boundaries and offers the convenience of learning at your own pace. This flexibility has also led modern learners to expect continuous learning opportunities.

After all, 86% of employees are willing to switch jobs if it affords them a better chance to grow.

Embracing the AI Age

Artificial intelligence (AI) has changed everything. Projections suggest it will be a \$1.3 trillion market by 2030. This is largely due to the efficiency gains it offers, with 64% of businesses believing that AI can boost productivity. But what impact will it have on modern learners?



Most Gen Z (54%) and Millennial (58%) individuals are open to using AI for everyday tasks. This percentage is lower for Gen X (39%) and Baby Boomers (30%). This suggests that digital natives and modern learners are more receptive to the adoption of AI.

As a result, they'll benefit from personalised learning experiences, including tailored content, adaptive learning, and individualised guidance. Getting this level of focused attention was previously prohibitively expensive. Now, however, there's already a bounty of AI-powered learning tools available.



MODERN LEARNERS' PREFERENCES

The characteristics we've explored, combined with technological advancements, have shaped the distinct desires of modern learners. To cater to the needs of this audience, we should consider the following preferences:

- **Microlearners:** Modern learners, known for their busy schedules and desire for instant gratification, are likely to gravitate toward microlearning experiences. This learning strategy delivers content in short, focused bursts. In fact, 94% of L&D professionals prefer microlearning over traditional eLearning courses.
- **Visual Learners:** Modern learners' short attention spans mean we now have to do more with less. Visual media is a great way to do this. After all, it's thought that we process visuals 600x faster than words. Perhaps this is why 83% of survey respondents prefer instructional videos to other types of learning content.
- **Social Learners:** Modern learners also thrive in collaborative learning environments. This means they enjoy learning through social interaction, discussion, and peer-to-peer activities. This aligns with the 70:20:10 model, which suggests that 20% of workplace learning happens through social activity.
- **Problem Solvers:** In today's fast-paced world, modern learners are more likely to engage with relevant content that solves specific challenges. Abstract learning material just won't cut it. Indeed, Merrill's First Principles instructional model, which emphasises problem-solving, has been found to be 9x more effective than traditional approaches.
- **Point of Need:** Similarly, modern learners will expect timely access to information and resources. Learning at the point of need ensures that knowledge is delivered just when it's required to solve a problem or complete a task. In fact, 57% of employees prefer this just-in-time approach to learning.
- **Learning in the Flow:** As we know, modern learners are time poor. As a result, they'll appreciate learning opportunities that fit neatly into their workflows. This aligns well with Josh Bersin's concept of 'learning in the flow of work'. We don't like being taken away from our tasks. This explains why 68% of employees prefer to learn on-the-job.
- **Emotionally Resonant:** Modern learners are easily distracted, so you'll have to pull out all the stops to keep their attention. Forging an emotional connection between learners and content is key. After all, the area of our brain associated with emotions is able to process information 20% faster than the cognitive area.

In Summary

The world is constantly changing, and so are our learners. By understanding the key characteristics and preferences of modern learners, we move that much closer to creating truly effective and engaging learning experiences.

To achieve this, we must embrace technology, promote collaboration, and personalise our learning experiences. We also need to acknowledge the demands that are placed on modern learners' time and energy.

Instead of a rigid, prescriptive approach, we should aim to foster a love of learning and provide open access to flexible and rewarding learning experiences. In turn, this will ensure your learners are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future.



ENGAGING THE MODERN LEARNER

Understanding the modern learner is one thing. But capturing their attention is another. Given the constant barrage of distractions and the threat of information overload, it's more important than ever to create engaging and effective learning experiences.

This generation of learners has more agency than ever before. After all, the internet has democratised access to knowledge and learners now have the power to shape their own learning journeys and career pathways.

This means your role is to guide learners, rather than dictate specific activities. However, there is some good news. You have access to a wide range of proven strategies to enhance learning outcomes.

In this section of the guidebook, we'll explore eight foolproof ways to engage modern learners, suggestions for integrating technology into your approach, and tips for overcoming common challenges.

But first, let's start by looking at the benefits of engaging this audience.



THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING MODERN LEARNERS

At this stage, you may well be wondering: is it worth the effort to adapt to the changing needs of modern learners? While it's tempting to stick to what you know, embracing new approaches can yield significant benefits. For example:

- **Increased Engagement:** Modern learners have to pick and choose how they spend their time. If you don't cater to their needs with learning that's relevant, engaging, and personalised, you're unlikely to motivate them into action. On the other hand, did you know that engaged learners generate 218% higher income per employee?
- **Improved Satisfaction:** By providing efficient, effective, and enjoyable learning experiences, you'll simultaneously boost learner satisfaction. In turn, satisfied learners are more likely to participate in future learning opportunities and recommend them to their peers. In fact, 70% of employees say that learning initiatives increase their sense of connection to their organisation.
- **Better Retention:** In today's competitive job market, retaining your top talent is crucial. By getting your approach to learning and development right, you can foster loyalty and reduce turnover. After all, 94% of employees say they would be more willing to stay in an organisation that invests in their development.
- **Boosted Productivity:** By cutting through the noise and providing pertinent and timely learning opportunities, you can enhance employee performance and productivity. In fact, according to an IBM study, relevant training has been shown to lead to a 37% increase in productivity. Not bad, right?
- **More Impact:** Improving employee productivity and performance can lead to a variety of other benefits. Indeed, according to Accenture, every dollar spent on training generates a return of \$4.53. As a result, you'll be able to secure better budgets for future learning programmes and earn the recognition you deserve within your organisation.

Of course, the benefits don't stop there. Tailoring your training will also improve employee wellbeing, promote collaboration, and support your organisational change initiatives. Failing to adapt could also lead to damaging consequences.

The global skills gap poses a significant threat, with potential revenue losses estimated at \$8.5 trillion over the next decade. This cost can be mitigated by arming learners with the future skills they need. As a result, you'll stay ahead of the curve and foster a culture of true innovation.

HOW TO MOTIVATE THE MODERN LEARNER

Now we know why it's important to engage modern learners, we can move on to look at how we do this. The following approaches can be used to create learning experiences that this generation of learners love.

Let's get started!

1. Make it Personal

Modern learners are used to high levels of personalisation. Popular platforms like Netflix, Spotify, and Amazon tailor content recommendations based on individual preferences and past behaviour. This sets a high standard for learning experiences to match.



Studies show that personalisation programmes can boost revenue by as much as 40%. Your learning strategy can benefit too. You should start by outlining a clear WIIFM ('what's in it for me?') for your audience. This will help you to establish a sense of purpose.

By tailoring learning experiences to individual job roles and interests, you'll ensure maximum relevance. Using real-world examples and case studies can also help to enhance engagement and knowledge retention.

Still not convinced? Well, did you know that 77% of L&D pros agree that personalisation leads to better levels of engagement?

2. Break it Down

Microlearning is a learning strategy that delivers content in short, focused chunks. Rather than delivering a full 6-hour opus on a training topic, this approach would break the content down into subtopics, each with a focused learning objective.



While there's no strict time limit, we suggest keeping microlearning experiences under 10-15 minutes for optimal engagement. This will make your content a much easier pill for modern learners to swallow.

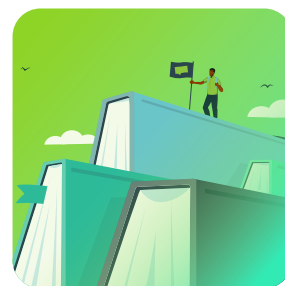
After all, learners can easily fit these short bursts of training into their busy schedules. Plus, microlearning has been shown to boost learning efficiency by 17%. Big change can come in small packages.

3. Share Knowledge

Modern learners thrive on connection and work best as part of a wider community. That's why they're likely to gravitate towards social learning experiences, which involve observing and interacting with others.

There are a variety of ways you can achieve this with your audience. For example, you could encourage learners to collaborate on projects, assign mentors and coaches, or implement social learning platforms that help to track knowledge sharing.

In fact, McKinsey research suggests that leveraging social learning tools can boost organisational productivity by up to 25%. Happy learners and real results - that sounds like a win-win to us!



4. Get Your Head in the Game

Gamification is the application of game mechanics to non-gaming environments to incentivise activity. For example, you could incorporate experience points, badges, and leaderboards within your learning environment to make it more fun and competitive.

This extra level of motivation can be pure catnip for modern learners. After all, gamification empowers them to visualise their progress, attain social status, and receive instant feedback and rewards in line with their actions.

Gamification can be applied to a wide range of learning scenarios, benefiting learners of all types. In fact, 90% of employees agree that gamification helps to make them more productive. Perhaps it's time to level up your learning?



5. Embrace Experience

As Julius Caesar once famously said, '*Ut est rerum omnium magister usus*'. For those of us who don't know Latin, that means 'experience is the teacher of all things'. And there's some truth to that. According to the 70:20:10 framework, 70% of workplace learning happens through practical experience.

With this in mind, you should attempt to engage your modern learners with hands-on activities, simulations, and real-world projects. Seek to provide them with opportunities to develop practical skills like problem-solving and critical thinking.



Experiential learning not only engages and inspires learners, it also improves retention rates. For example, one study shows that learning through experience can improve knowledge retention by as much as 70%.

6. Tell a Story

Storytelling has been a powerful mechanism for knowledge sharing since ancient times. And today, modern learners still appreciate the power of a good story. In fact, personal stories and gossip make up 65% of our conversations.

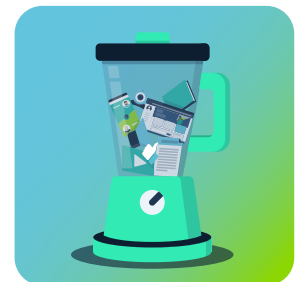


With this in mind, you should seek to incorporate a narrative within your key learning touchpoints. This could involve creating a story arc that connects different learning modules or using real-world case studies to illustrate key concepts.

As a result, your learners will feel more immersed and they'll forge an emotional connection with your content. Research by cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner suggests we are 22 times more likely to remember information presented in a story format.

7. Mix up Your Formats

Variety is the spice of life. To keep easily-distracted modern learners engaged, you'll need to provide a diverse set of interactive learning experiences.



For instance, you should consider including the following formats within your training programmes:

- **Text-based content:** Articles, research papers, and case studies
- **Visual content:** Videos, diagrams, charts, and infographics
- **Interactive content:** Quizzes, simulations, and learning games
- **Audio content:** Recorded lectures, podcasts, and audiobooks

While creating diverse learning experiences may require additional effort, the results are worth it. At the very least you should ensure your training material isn't solely text-based. There's a reason why 36% of us prefer video-based learning.

8. Learning On-Demand

When you're busy juggling tasks, timely access to information is crucial. If you're a frontline worker, there's no use learning something after an interaction with a customer. Learning should occur at the point of need, so it can be applied immediately.



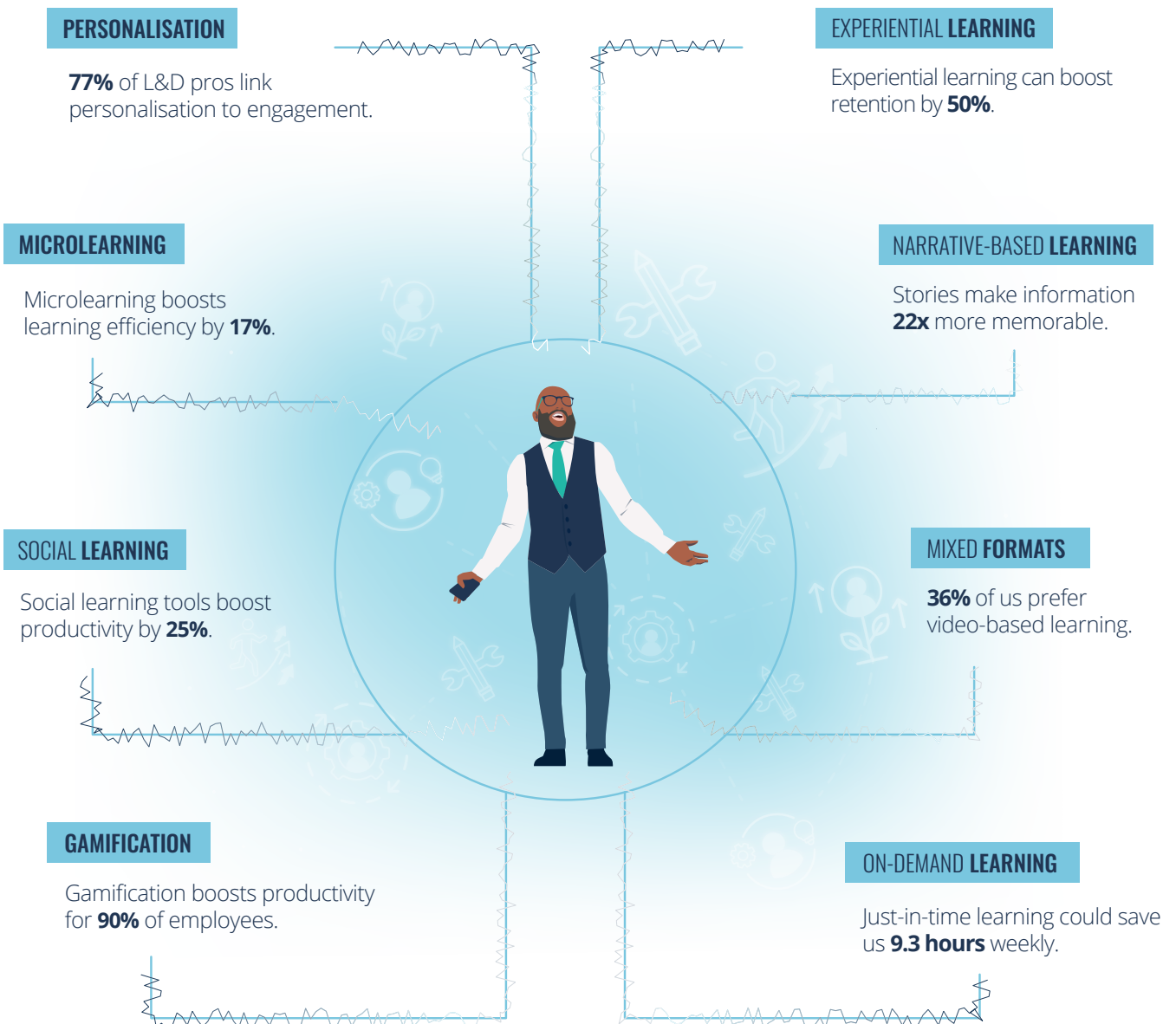
Despite this, the average employee spends 9.3 hours per week searching for information. In other words, getting an answer to a pressing question is often like finding a needle in a haystack. If this process could be improved, modern learners would have an extra working day every week to get tasks done.

Of course, this is no small feat. To truly democratise access to information within your organisation, you'll need to build a comprehensive content plan and establish the right digital tools for ease of access. This is something we'll explore further in our next section.



ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY SUMMARY

So, there we have it. We've explored eight foolproof strategies to engage your modern learners. We hope these inspire you to take action. For a quick reference, check out the infographic below.



LEVERAGE YOUR TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE

In most cases, modern learners have grown up in the digital age. As a result, they're accustomed to using technology in both their personal and professional lives. This has created a set of expectations that you must meet to ensure a positive learning experience.

In particular, you should consider the following technological factors:

- **Online Learning:** Modern learners value flexibility and convenience. By implementing online learning and blended learning programmes, you can provide educational experiences that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. This empowers learners to learn at their own pace and on their terms.
- **Go Mobile First:** Today's learners are never too far away from their mobile devices. As such, you should ensure that all your content is accessible and optimised for viewing on smartphones and tablets. You should even consider developing or utilising dedicated mobile learning apps to provide focused and convenient learning experiences.
- **Ensure Accessibility:** As with any group of learners, modern learners have to contend with disabilities and impairments. Fortunately, technology can help to bridge these accessibility gaps. You should adhere to accessibility standards like WCAG and provide content in multiple formats to accommodate diverse learning needs and preferences.
- **Data Analytics:** Implementing online learning solutions will also grant you access to a wealth of data. In turn, you'll gain valuable insights into learner engagement, performance, and preferences. This means you'll get to know your modern learners on a deeper level and will be well-placed to optimise your learning programme.
- **Automate With AI:** The artificial intelligence (AI) revolution is reshaping industries, and education is no exception. Learning professionals everywhere should sit up and take notice. Where possible, use AI to tailor content, create learning pathways, and streamline your processes. If you're using AI to generate learning material, ensure you do so responsibly.

BALANCING INTRINSIC & EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

By now, you might be wondering: can't I just incentivise my modern learners to take action through rewards and recognition? Alternatively, couldn't we make training completion mandatory? These carrot and stick questions are worth considering.

Ultimately, engaging your learners requires a delicate balance between two types of motivation:

- **Intrinsic Motivation:** This type of motivation comes from within. It's the drive to do something because it's inherently satisfying or enjoyable. For example, you might learn to play the guitar because you find it fun and relaxing.
- **Extrinsic Motivation:** This type of motivation comes from external sources. For instance, you might be motivated to act, based on the promise of a reward, or the threat of punishment. The grading system used in schools is an example of extrinsic motivation.



While extrinsic motivation can be useful for short term goals, or learning topics where there's limited interest or appeal, it does have some serious limitations. What's more, implementing a robust rewards system can be costly and time-consuming.

As such, we recommend focusing on intrinsic motivation, as this is more sustainable and leads to deeper learning experiences. Your modern learners already want to take ownership over their development. Enabling this requires open access to relevant learning, support when needed, and gentle encouragement.

This will all be worthwhile. After all, this 2011 study shows that intrinsic motivation is three times more powerful than extrinsic motivation. Additionally, McKinsey data reveals that intrinsically motivated employees are:

- **32%** more committed to their job
- **46%** more satisfied with their work
- **16%** more productive than their peers

OVERCOMING MODERN LEARNING CHALLENGES

Unfortunately, even if you implement all these recommendations, your modern learners still won't have everything their own way. With this in mind, here are a few additional challenges to consider, along with our suggestions for overcoming them.

- **Distractions:** With constant distractions from social media, messaging apps, and emails, your modern learners will have to fight to maintain focus. To combat this, provide guidance on creating a distraction-free environment, minimising digital noise, and adopting a suitable time management technique.
- **Procrastination:** Even without distractions, the temptation to delay tasks or avoid difficult subjects can hinder the progress of even the most persistent learner. To mitigate this, we recommend providing each learner with clear development goals and a structured study plan. Assigning a colleague or a study buddy can also help to keep learners accountable.
- **Mental Health:** For some learners, a new training programme could be viewed as an additional burden. This can increase stress levels and negatively impact learner performance. As such, it's crucial that you establish realistic goals and provide accessible social and support channels where learners can openly discuss their concerns.
- **Information Veracity:** As you empower your audience to take charge of their learning, a new challenge will emerge: the rise of misinformation and fake news. To help learners navigate this new landscape, we recommend providing training to enhance their critical thinking skills. This training should enable them to evaluate the credibility of sources and verify information.
- **Technology Changes:** As technology evolves, even modern learners may struggle to keep up. Just look at the relatively slow adoption of AI. To address this, focus on developing strong digital skills and fostering a culture of continuous learning. You should also take care to highlight the benefits of emerging technologies and how they can enhance career prospects.

FEEDBACK AND OPTIMISATION

Even after implementing our suggestions and addressing the challenges we've outlined, you still won't be able to rest on your laurels. To ensure the ongoing success of your learning initiatives, it's crucial to continuously evaluate and refine your strategies.

Start by selecting an evaluation framework, such as the Kirkpatrick Model, and determining the depth of your assessment. Then you'll need to implement regular feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of your learning strategies.

You should seek to gather insights from your learners through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. If you're using online learning solutions then you'll be able to generate reports and analyse data to identify trends.

Following this, adapt your approach based on the results you've observed. As you optimise your learning programmes, remain open to new ideas, stay informed about the latest trends and technologies, and actively listen to what your modern learners are telling you.



In Summary

Engaging the modern learner in today's noisy digital world can feel like a daunting task. Thankfully, there are proven strategies to cut through the clutter and captivate your audience.

By personalising your training programmes, embracing social learning, and incentivising the experience through gamification, you're sure to make an impact. You can then boost your results by using technological solutions like mobile learning apps and artificial intelligence.

Of course, there will be other challenges along the way. But none of these are insurmountable if you take a proactive approach. By maintaining an open dialogue with your learners you'll adapt to their evolving needs and be ready for whatever comes.

And your modern learners will thank you for it.



WHAT ARE FUTURE SKILLS?

As the world changes, so too must our skill sets. Future skills are the abilities and competencies that will be in high demand in the future workforce. These abilities empower individuals to adapt to change and seize opportunities.

We can categorise skills into two main brackets:

- **Hard Skills:** Hard skills are technical abilities that can be learned and measured. These skills are often industry or role-specific. For instance, to excel in your role, you may require proficiency in specialised software or machinery. As technology evolves, you'll need to continually upgrade your hard skills.
- **Soft Skills:** Soft skills are interpersonal or cognitive skills that are essential for effective communication and collaboration. By nature, they are often more difficult to quantify and measure. The ever changing nature of work will necessitate a shift in the soft skills we prioritise.

Psst. Want to upskill your team for free? Here are [10 soft skill eLearning courses!](#)



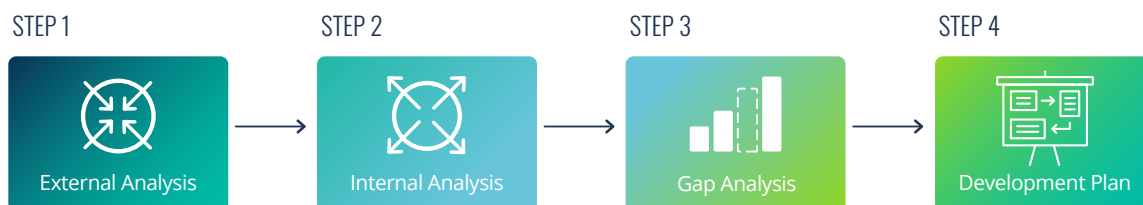
THE FORCES SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK

We're living in a time of unprecedented and profound transformation. Amidst this whirlwind of change, it's essential to understand the key forces that are driving the future of work, and how they'll affect individuals and organisations alike.

- **Technological Advancements:** The rapid pace of technological advancement is fundamentally reshaping our world. Billions of dollars are being poured into AI research, processing power is increasing, and 90% of the world's data has been generated in the last two years. Remaining competitive in the digital age requires continually adapting as technology improves.
- **Economic Shifts:** While the global economy is currently growing at a steady 3.2%, significant shifts have already transformed the business landscape. For example, 36% of the American workforce is now freelancing. What's more, e-commerce is booming, with 20.1% of retail purchases now taking place online. Add to this geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions, and it's clear that an adaptable skill set has become a necessity.
- **Globalised Workforce:** Our increasingly digital world has brought forth unprecedented levels of globalisation. In fact, today's world trade volume is roughly 44 times the level recorded back in 1950. To thrive in this context, individuals need to cultivate intercultural competence, language skills, and the ability to collaborate with people from different backgrounds.
- **Demographic Changes:** Demographic trends are also reshaping the skills landscape. As older generations retire, there may be shortages of experienced workers in certain sectors. Conversely, we're now seeing younger generations and digital natives entering the workforce. This generational divide is already evident. In fact, 47% of Gen Z employees feel that older workers slow things down through outdated working practices.
- **Job Market Demands:** Unfortunately, automation will displace workers. However, it will also create new opportunities. By 2027, an estimated 97 million new jobs are expected to emerge. This shift will drive demand for professionals in fields like data science, machine learning, and cyber security. As you would expect, these roles will require a new set of skills and competencies.

HOW TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANISATION'S FUTURE SKILL NEEDS

To ensure your organisation is well-equipped to navigate these changes, you'll need to conduct a thorough assessment of your current capabilities and future skill needs. This is what's known as a training needs analysis (TNA).



Not sure where to start? Don't worry, we're here to help!

Step 1: External Analysis

You can't assess your future needs without understanding the broader context in which you operate. To achieve this, you'll need to conduct a thorough external analysis of the emerging trends that will impact your industry. In particular, you should focus on:

- **Industry Analysis:** First things first, you'll need to understand the competitive landscape you're operating within. Without the right market research data you'll be flying blind. However, once you're armed with the right information you'll be well-positioned to identify opportunities and avoid potential threats.
- **Technological Analysis:** Next, consider the impact of emerging technologies. What sort of role will artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and the Internet of Things play in your sector? Identify the benefits and challenges of each new solution. Then consider how you'd prioritise their adoption based on your current needs.
- **Economic Analysis:** Economic trends have the power to make or break all your best laid plans. With this in mind, take some time to consider economic factors like inflation, interest rates, and global economic conditions. You won't always be able to see these changes coming, but it's good to be ready for anything.
- **Regulatory Analysis:** The regulatory landscape is constantly evolving, with new laws and guidelines being introduced at a rapid clip. To stay ahead, it's essential to remain informed about any regulatory changes that could impact your industry. This proactive approach will help you to develop effective compliance strategies.

Step 2: Internal Analysis

Now you know what the world outside your window looks like, it's time to turn inward. At this stage, you should assess your organisation's current strengths and weaknesses. This will provide the insights needed to drive continuous improvement.

- **Review Your Objectives:** To anticipate future needs, you must first assess your current goals. Start by evaluating your organisation's strategic goals, key objectives, and major initiatives. This information is crucial, as it gives your organisation a sense of purpose and a clearly defined direction.
- **Determine Core Competencies:** Based on your understanding of your goals and objectives, you should now be able to identify the core competencies your organisation requires. Create a list and prioritise them according to their strategic importance. Additionally, consider the skills and knowledge required to maintain these competencies.
- **Conduct a Skill Inventory:** With this information in mind, it's time to establish your organisation's current state of play. To do this, you'll need to conduct an inventory of your employee's skills and experience. This will require collecting data from various sources, including employee profiles, performance reviews, and surveys.
- **Consider Your Values:** Finally, consider how your organisation's culture and values align with your future goals and skill requirements. Will they support or hinder your growth? By aligning your strategies with your values, you can create a more engaged, motivated, and productive workforce.

Step 3: Gap Analysis

You now have a clear understanding of your employees' current skills and knowledge, alongside the external trends shaping future industry needs. Equipped with this information, you can effectively identify and address any skills gaps within your workforce.

A skills gap analysis will help you to pinpoint the specific areas where your team lacks the necessary competencies to achieve your strategic goals. Remember, you're not just assessing your current situation. You also need to consider the skills that will be required for future roles or initiatives.

Next, determine which skills gaps have the greatest impact on your organisation's strategic goals. This will help you to prioritise your development needs and allocate training budget and resources effectively.

Need more support? We've got a full article on skills gap analysis [here](#).

Step 4: Development Plan

Once you know your organisational skills gaps, it's time to take decisive action and future-proof your workforce. Here are three key strategies to address skill deficiencies and empower your team.

- **Training & Development:** Skills gaps can be resolved by investing in training and development programmes. Even here, there are a variety of options for you to consider. For instance, you can offer structured courses and workshops (formal learning), coaching and mentoring initiatives, or flexible online courses.
- **Recruitment & Hiring:** If your training efforts are unable to fully address your skills gaps, you may need to look externally to recruit and hire top talent. To attract the right candidates, develop a recruitment strategy that emphasises the future skills you need within job descriptions and interviews.
- **Performance Management:** The final piece of the puzzle is performance management. Implementing the right systems and processes will help you to foster a culture of continuous improvement. You'll also need to ensure your employees are motivated to develop new skills and provide regular feedback and coaching.

And there you have it. By following this structured approach, you'll be able to assess your organisation's future skill needs and develop a potent strategic response. It won't be an easy process, but by following these steps, you will succeed.



IN-DEMAND SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Every organisation has unique skill needs, but certain skills are consistently in high demand. Indeed, the following set of hard and soft skills are likely to be crucial to your success for years to come.

Future Hard Skills:

- **Artificial Intelligence:** Understanding and applying AI and machine learning techniques will help to automate tasks and drive organisational efficiency. However, according to a recent survey, 70% of workers still need to upgrade their AI skills.
- **Data Science:** Back in 2020, a World Economic Forum report identified data science as the field with the largest skills gap. While things have changed since then, the fundamental need to collect, analyse, and interpret large datasets persists.
- **Cybersecurity:** To protect sensitive information and systems from cyber threats, organisations need skilled professionals. In fact, 70% of survey respondents agree that cybersecurity skill shortages create additional risks for their organisations.
- **Cloud Computing:** Cloud technologies can help organisations to develop a competitive edge in the digital age. Indeed, 85% of IT professionals agree that a lack of expertise in cloud operations has impeded their ability to achieve business goals
- **Automation:** Two-thirds of knowledge workers agree that automation has helped to make them more efficient. To fully harness this productivity, your employees will need the skills and knowledge necessary to use automation systems.

Of course, we're just scratching the surface here. Depending on your specific needs, you may also want to consider digital skills like social media marketing, UX design, and e-commerce. Additionally, skills like project management, financial analysis, and software development are essential for many organisations.

Future Soft Skills:

- **Critical Thinking:** 78% of business executives agree that critical thinking is the most essential skill for employees. After all, the ability to analyse complex problems and devise the appropriate solution means you're ready to tackle any challenge.
- **Creativity & Innovation:** Innovation requires brave and creative thinking. Unfortunately, 85% of executives agree that fear holds back innovation efforts within their organisation. To overcome this, your employees will have to learn to take risks and think outside the box.
- **Adaptability:** Did you know that almost half (44%) of employees don't recognise adaptability as a skill they possess? In today's rapidly changing world, adaptability is a crucial skill for navigating challenges and capitalising on emerging opportunities.
- **Resilience:** Rapid change often leads to uncertainty, stress, and anxiety. Thankfully, resilience training can significantly mitigate these effects and reduce average depression symptoms by 33% to 44%. This helps your team to thrive in dynamic environments.
- **Empathy:** In our increasingly digital world, human skills like empathy will become something of a superpower. This is reflected in the fact that 76% of employees with empathetic managers report higher levels of engagement.
- **Communication Skills:** 72% of business leaders agree that good communication increases productivity at work. After all, communication skills help your employees to articulate their ideas clearly, both verbally and in writing.
- **Digital Literacy:** An estimated 90% of jobs across Europe now require basic digital knowledge and skills. And this is just the beginning. As digital transformation accelerates, your employees will need to expand their digital skill set to keep pace.

The list of beneficial soft skills doesn't stop there. For instance, you should also consider cultivating your employees' emotional intelligence, active listening ability, and leadership skills. Additionally, you should seek to encourage curiosity and a love of lifelong learning. This brings us neatly to our final section.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE LIFELONG LEARNING

Thinking about future skills is like being in constant motion. After all, it's a continuous process. Once you've addressed your current skills gaps, you'll then need to shift your focus back to anticipating future needs.

There's two ways of looking at this. You could see it as an exhausting loop. Alternatively, you might view it as an opportunity to foster the right sort of culture within your organisation — an ethos and a focus that looks forward instead of backwards.

Indeed, high-performance learning cultures like this have been shown to be 37% more productive and 17% more likely to be a market leader. In other words, getting your learning culture right has a meaningful impact on your organisation's bottom line.

To get there, you should focus on building learner curiosity and a growth mindset. You can do this by moving from a pedagogical (teacher-centred) approach to a heutagogical (self-directed) approach. This involves providing the right resources, guidance, and support to empower learners to take ownership of their development.



FINAL WORDS

Even if your organisation is thriving in the current digital landscape, you can't afford to rest on your laurels. The world is moving too quickly for modern learners to sit still. With this in mind, it's clear that investing in future skills has become a business imperative.

This raises the question: which specific skills should you prioritise? In this guidebook, we've detailed a variety of hard and soft skills that are important now, and will be even more important in the future.

However, to truly future-proof your workforce, you'll need to proactively identify and address your organisation's specific skill needs. The time to act is now. It's better to ride the crest of a wave than be underneath it.

By prioritising the development of future skills, you can unlock your team's potential and safeguard your organisation's long-term success. You know your modern learners now. You also know what skills they need and how to engage them. The rest is up to you.



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