

Learn Together to Work Better Together:

Unlocking the Value of Remote Connection at Work





Humans are social by nature. This isn't a platitude; it's an outcome of human evolution. To be healthy, we need to form bonds with other people, and with so many waking hours spent at work, a lot of this bonding—which helps us build identity and self-worth—occurs in professional settings. At least, it did.

But when employees are no longer able to laugh together as they grab a coffee, share team lunches, or exchange side-eye during *those* meetings, bonding becomes harder. In recent times, when so many workers have moved into remote or hybrid environments, building those crucial social bonds is difficult.

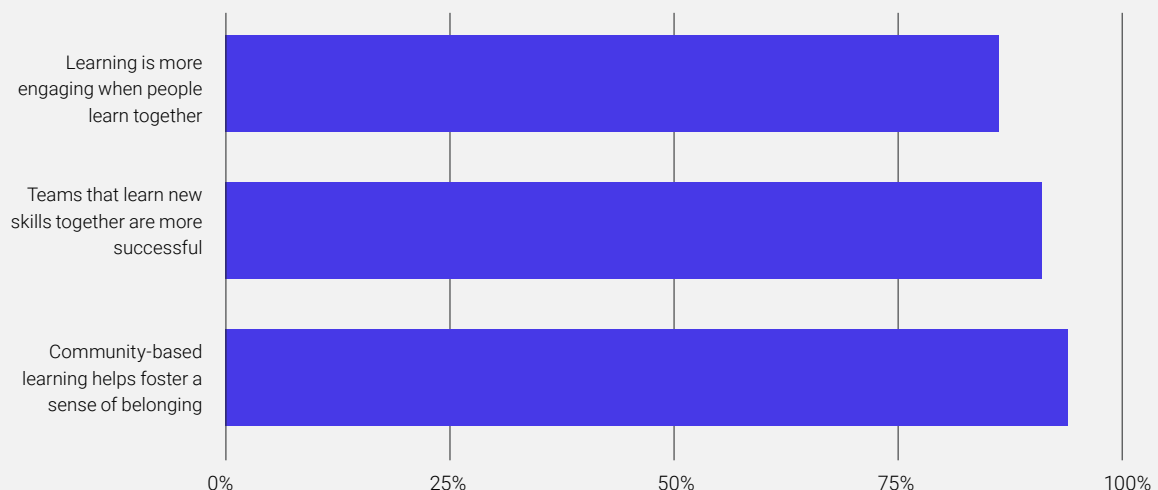
Difficult—but not impossible. A powerful way to encourage and strengthen those bonds, while also helping employees to level up professionally, is learning. In this guidebook, we'll discuss the benefits of offering shared learning and training opportunities—from reducing turnover to increasing engagement, efficiency, and productivity in increasingly remote and hybrid workplaces.



The case for building connections remotely

Despite the ethos of “pulling yourself up by the bootstraps,” personal and professional growth is challenging in isolation. We grow and learn more, it turns out, [when we are connected to one another](#). How much more? According to a recent [LinkedIn Learning survey](#), 86% of respondents found learning experiences more engaging when shared, 91% reported greater success when learning alongside others, and 92% claimed that shared learning helped create a sense of belonging.

Learning Together Is Better



Source: [LinkedIn Learning](#). Benefits of shared learning experiences, as reported by percentage of L&D survey respondents.

While “sense of belonging” may feel fluffy, especially in an era where companies are hurting for good employees, it can’t be dismissed. The HOW Institute for Society reports that **44% of workers felt less connected to their coworkers during the pandemic**. At the same time, [PwC reports that almost a third of the workforce](#) is looking for a new job. As a result of Covid, the phenomenon of “[turnover shock](#),” where an individual undergoes a big event—a marriage, birth, divorce, illness, etc.—that spurs self-reflection or the need for a change has been happening *en masse*. And with virtual work making geography less of a factor, workers re-evaluating their vocational choices, and **11 million job openings to choose from**, the Great Resignation is real. Today, the onus is on employers to give their people a reason to stay, and creating a sense of belonging is a powerful way to do this.



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But how can employers create this sense of belonging? [Research shows that training and employee development can help—especially when the learning is collaborative](#). According to research by PwC, **60% of businesses successfully improved culture and engagement through an upskilling program—and 86% of respondents reported that education programs and digital training have improved both engagement and performance**. And when engagement is driven by learning and development, employees also gain skills and increase their knowledge base, adding another layer to their value. What’s more, shared learning experiences help empower [employees, develop future leaders, and build workplace relationships](#).

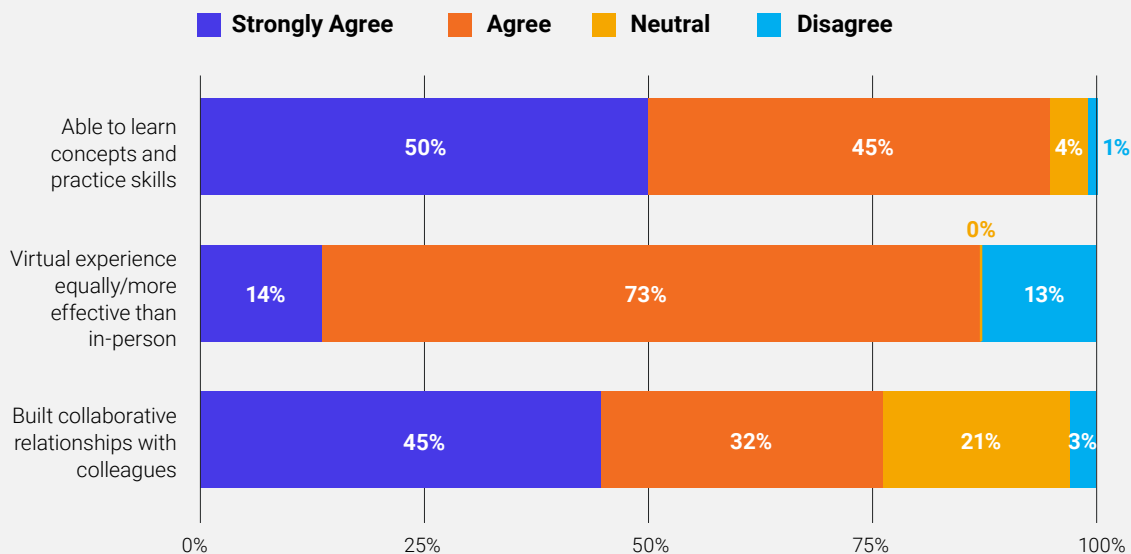
In short, workplace learning and development create positive experiences for the employee, while supporting the business’s bottom line. It’s a win for everyone involved—especially, as we’ll describe in the following section, when it’s done live.

Workplace learning: why prioritize live?

The value and potential of workplace learning is critical—but to fully realize the benefits of providing structured learning to employees, it must be delivered effectively. And this can be tricky. McKinsey reports that [80% of businesses agree that learning and development are very important](#) to their long-term growth, but only a third consider their efforts to be consistently successful in having an impact. Complicating matters, the experience of remote work during Covid-19 has forever changed the workplace. [More than 70% of workers want flexible remote work options](#) to remain in place, and 66% of businesses are considering redesigns of physical spaces to better suit hybrid work.

As for the implementation of training, the sheer number of options can feel overwhelming. Today there is a wide array of modalities for delivering learning experiences, including on-demand, asynchronous, pre-recorded, and self-guided. But live instruction—where the facilitator and employees share the experience in real-time—is arguably the best way to deliver learning experiences that create that critical human connection. Why? There are a great many advantages to working collaboratively in a shared space—even a virtual one.

Learners Agree—Virtual Workshops Are Effective and Build Connections



Source: [McKinsey](#), 2020. Based on responses to survey questions from 660 learners across 14 organizations after completing virtual-learning programs between April and June 2020.

The benefits of live-virtual training:

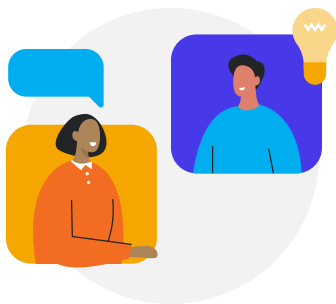


Efficiency and accountability

Few would admit out loud that they've mindlessly clicked through a training course, but it's safe to say it happens. There have been many efforts to slow a learner down to ensure they actually absorb the material, but one is tried and true—face-to-face learning. Many employees prefer learning in groups and appreciate having dedicated time for learning. Skilled facilitators can connect content to the needs of the audience and adapt on-the-fly. Design elements that control the flow of learning, such as live questions, comprehension checks, group discussion and practice, and assessment scenarios can all help ensure what is being learned gets closer to returning to the desk.

Active learning

Active learning can be **1.5 times more successful** than passive learning. In practice, this means bringing people together to participate in—rather than simply consume—the learning experience through discussions and opportunities for practice that allow people to internalize and activate new knowledge. Thanks to the live setting, facilitators can encourage questions and offer feedback. They can also move teams or members into breakouts to provide additional guidance or to drill down into specifics related to different job roles.



Cross-team collaboration

Get everyone out of their siloes. Live virtual learning lets you bring together teams and individuals with differing expertise or who are responsible for different pieces of a shared process. Encourage learners to share their perspectives and discuss the ways the subject impacts their work, as well as how it may relate to other teams and processes. This kind of engagement is powerful. It can [improve collaboration, reveal inefficiencies, and drive creativity, flexibility, and innovation throughout your organization](#).

Training in “human” skills

While a lot of work has gone digital, many of the skills we rely on most aren't technological, they're “human.” To succeed in their current jobs or prepare for their next ones, employees need work honing these “soft” skills. Thinking critically and creatively, communicating effectively, and understanding clients' needs, for example, are all skills that are needed in almost every role. Live virtual training provides the perfect setting to work on these skills through role-playing or other small group work.



A decade ago, live training sessions were expensive, with employers paying great sums for travel, lodging, venues, food, learning materials, etc. The heavy cost made it difficult to scale training, often resulting in piecemeal opportunities for development that left employees under-trained and failed to meet individual goals or larger business objectives. With the proliferation of virtual conferencing technology and digital training tools, however, you can now bring everyone together regardless of geography, as well as more easily accommodate schedules and break training into smaller, more digestible chunks. Employees have likewise become more accustomed to and comfortable with virtual formats for connection and learning.

Online tools have made training more customizable and scalable. But as we know, all digital experiences are not equal. Even when live, digital learning experiences can sometimes lack the human connection that builds real bonds, makes employees feel successful and satisfied, and creates the kind of shared endeavor that has real business impact. In the next section, we'll look at ways to build an online learning experience that centers on real people.

Virtual learning with a human focus

There's no single way to design an employee training program. Every organization, department, team, and learner will have different objectives and needs, define success differently, and come to the experience with unique expectations. But there is one constant that can make a learning program successful across multiple organizations or departments. The key to developing an effective program lies in embracing human-centered design—putting your learners and their needs at the center of the program. Let's look at some key best practices for implementing human-centered design.

Best practices for human-centered online learning

Social and collaborative – When learning new skills together, employees can see how they each approach situations differently, help one another catch mistakes, and empower one another to contribute more fully.

Discussions – Conversation is a powerful way of helping learners internalize new material. Discussion also encourages reflection, develops shared mindsets, and can reveal insights that no one would have had on their own. As an added benefit, employees who feel able to discuss things openly are also more likely to contribute in deeper ways.

Real-time practice and feedback – The odds that new information will be remembered and applied dramatically increase when new skills are put into action quickly and are supported and reinforced by observation and feedback. The real-time nature of a live session in a safe space enables employees to internalize and hone new skills before applying them in real-world situations.

Application to the job – Bringing learners together gives them a chance to share personal and professional experiences and build context about how to apply learning to their individual circumstances. This can inform how others work, reveal new ways to apply knowledge or skills to the job, and unlock innovation within and across teams.

Group projects – Group projects mirror team-based approaches to work and can help employees develop the interpersonal skills they need for their jobs. These experiences help employees build the know-how required to work towards a common purpose, learn the how of collaboration within an organization, and be a good team member.

Break out of large groups – It's difficult to understate the value of breakouts. In large groups, virtual or otherwise, many learners find it difficult to engage with the material, connect with the facilitator, or contribute to the experience. [Breakouts can remove this barrier to intimacy and engagement.](#)



Maximize Time and Impact in Live Virtual Learning



DO provide clear expectations, goals, and agendas.



DO split training into digestible sessions.



DO follow up to see how new processes are working.



DON'T schedule training around sensitive deadlines.



DON'T spend all day training. Digital fatigue is real.



DON'T rehash what learners already know.

Human-centered design is perhaps the most important factor in creating a learning experience that makes an impact. And when your program is digital, choosing the right technology is a critical piece of centering the learner experience. After all, the technology platform you choose can either help foster engagement and connection—or act as a barrier, creating frustration and isolation.



Your platform can make—or break—the learning experience

Remember, in-person has been the gold standard for face-to-face training for a long time. But this was often because it was the *only* quality option to bring people together in a safe space to learn with and from peers and experts. This has changed in recent years with improvements in the quality and availability of videoconferencing technology. While such platforms provide exciting opportunities to make live learning more accessible and scalable, many—facilitators and participants alike—have found it challenging to recreate the rich context and opportunities for connection that are standard in in-person settings.

In face-to-face settings, facilitators and other observers can easily read the room, picking up on verbal and non-verbal cues to see how well they're connecting with their audience. It's not difficult to determine who's engaged and who's not, or when learners aren't grasping the material—and to adjust accordingly. But in typical video conference-based training, gauging audience focus is much harder. Instructors may get very general impressions from participants based on their behavior—how much they're speaking, if they turn their cameras off, or if they leave early. But those observations often aren't recorded in a usable way and end up lost in the ether.

Participants, too, can struggle to stay connected to each other and to the material in online settings. In face-to-face settings, people communicate with each other in many ways not limited to voice. Body language and facial expressions convey a wide range of information that feeds into discussions. These cues can be missed in online settings, leading not just to a loss of understanding but a general drain of energy. Furthermore, it can be challenging to stay tuned in when switching applications to access resources shared during the session.

Participants too can stay connected to each other and the content within the experience with enhanced opportunities to share non-verbal feedback, participate in chat, and collaborate in real time. Breakout rooms, when enhanced with direct access to workplace tools, allow participants to put new thinking to work in the moment.

Put together, these capabilities can transform the standard virtual meeting into authentic and engaging learning experiences that can be scaled and help your organization improve and grow your training efforts to have the greatest impact on your people and your business.



TIP: When designing live virtual experiences, intentionally use features like chat, sidebars, content sharing, and breakout rooms to allow participants to interact with facilitators and each other.

Conclusion: Meeting Demand in a Changing Landscape

There's a thirst from workers for virtual on-the-job learning and digital upskilling.

A staggering 77% of workers say they want to reskill, with 40% already taking the initiative to increase their digital skills during the pandemic. By leveraging the right kinds of technology and focusing on learning methods that support connections, businesses can help their workers develop new skills, collaborate better with their teammates, and become more engaged and productive employees. Considering the current climate of change, the persistence of remote working environments, the need for new digital skills, and the current high rate of job turnover, learning at work with a focus on building connections generates real value for everyone involved.



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