



# Learning and development trends in 2021

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6 things you need to know about learning and development right now

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# Introduction

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We're currently dealing with a huge skills gap. Seismic.

In fact, according to some [reports](#), nearly *120 million workers over the world's 12 largest economies will need to be retrained and reskilled over the coming years as a result of AI*. This means the role of learning and development (L&D) professionals – and the L&D strategies they choose to roll out – are more critical than ever. If we want our initiatives to stick, then the learning itself needs to be 'sticky'. But how does that look?


One of the first things we should do is explore the key trends in learning and development right now. We hope to take a deeper dive into these – and how you can leverage them – over the course of this guide.

We'll be exploring bite-size learning, soft skills, deskless learners, and the

importance of CEOs getting behind their L&D strategy. Hint: it's more important than you might think.

As we keep saying, the world has changed, and we need to make sure learning and development changes with it. Most of all, we need to tune into our audience... and deliver what they need.

Because learning and development in a post-pandemic world should never just be more of the same.



“We need to build training that fits our employees rather than trying to make our employees fit our training.” - Forbes

# 1. Making learning accessible for deskless workers

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Let's kick off with a stat.

According to reports, 80% of the global workforce is deskless. In the words of Forbes, "that leaves [2.7 billion people](#) who are part of the deskless workforce, with jobs that involve walking around and interacting directly with people, machines and infrastructure."

Just think for a moment about all the learning and development content that these employees can't access. How, then, can organizations possibly level up their workforce?

In short, they can't. And not only that, but they also run the risk of employees disengaging with them completely.

*84% of deskless workers in the US say they don't get enough communication from the top tier of management, and only 56% say they feel connected and engaged with their employers.*

Creating learning and development opportunities is one way to build those stronger ties and engagement – because, as we know, employees want to be invested in and developed.

*Bite-sized takeaway:*

Learning must be accessible for more than just office-based workers.



80% of the global  
workforce is now  
deskless, but is  
our learning and  
development?

## 2. Keeping learning short and bite-sized

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We're time-poor. We're juggling multiple priorities. We're also trying to keep our heads above water as we continue to deal with the impact of the pandemic on our lives.

In an attempt to keep the culture alive and the lines of communication open, organizations looked for and implemented new initiatives.

Unfortunately, the result became extended working hours and that three-hour Zoom meeting that could have been a quick email. Are we right?

Remote working has shed light on what works for learning and development... and what doesn't. According to a [Workplace Learning Trends Report](#) by Udemy, 61% of respondents say that lack of time prevents them

from upskilling. They argue that *the key to making learning effective is to build it into the "flow" of work*. This is where the value of bite-size learning comes in. And in fact, people seem to prefer learning as and when they need it – rather than having to attend a designated session – with [56%](#) saying they prefer learning at “the point of need.”

### *Bite-sized takeaway:*

Build snackable learning into the day-to-day.

A man with glasses and a blue shirt is sitting at a desk, smiling while talking on a mobile phone. He is in a modern office setting with a large computer monitor, a desk lamp, and a white door in the background. The entire image has a light green overlay.

Learning has to fit into the flow of work, with over 50% of employees saying they prefer learning at the point of need.



### 3. Focused on soft skills with staying power

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If you think soft skills are just the fluff to the really important stuff, you may be surprised to find that the opposite is true. Not having the right soft skills can actually be harmful to an organizations' bottom line.

In fact, one [survey](#) conducted by a recruitment firm for UK fast-growth companies found that *54 percent of those who responded said they struggled to find candidates with a necessary mix of soft skills – and 51% admitted this was damaging business growth.* Damaging business growth? Now that's a pretty big deal.

Another study reported by [People Matters](#) found that the pandemic had exposed that business leaders lacked key soft skills, according to their

employees. As [LinkedIn Learning](#) put it, soft skills have a longer shelf-life than hard skills, which tend to date much more quickly.

Business is ultimately about relationships, and we need to draw on those soft skills in order to make those relationships work. How can organizations integrate the development of soft skills to support their L&D plans?

#### *Bite-sized takeaway:*

Never underestimate the value of soft skills in business.

A lack of soft skills can be damaging to business growth, and leaders are also reported to be lacking in this area.



## 4. Designed with the workforce in mind

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Today's leading businesses share one crucial thing in common, putting their customers first, doing business around them, and doing what's important to them. Therefore, it makes sense that when developing plans and initiatives in L&D, organizations take on a similar approach. Keeping their workforce and their best interest front and center.

According to [reports](#), *millennials made up half the US workforce last year, and it will rise to 75% by 2025.*


The millennial generation is a social media generation, a playlist generation, a generation that considers instant gratification to be the

norm. Is your organization's current learning experience engaging enough to keep them interested?

Of course, millennials are not the only generation in our workforce. Our current workforce includes Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z, all working towards the same organizational goals. Organizations must understand both the generational similarities and differentiators to create a learning experience that is inclusive, empowering, and effective.

### *Bite-sized takeaway:*

Consider who the workforce is and what they would engage with.



Millennials will make up the majority of the US workforce in a few years' time - what sort of L&D content will grab their attention?

## 5. Championed from the top

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You may think that CEOs don't have a part to play in creating a continuous learning culture in an organization. But in actuality, they need to play an active role for it to be successful.

According to the 2020 [LinkedIn Learning](#) report, *83% of learning and development professionals say their executives support employee learning... but only 27% say their CEOs are active learning champions.*

As it stands, managers are also more engaged with learning than employees, with managers spending 30% more time learning soft skills than the average employee. However, there's a direct correlation between the amount of time spent learning and the managers' recognition of such

learning. In fact, 36% of millennial workers and 44% of Gen-Z workers say they would spend more time learning if managers recognized it.

So there it is: nurture a culture of learning and development, and your workforce will actively participate in it. The stick is not in the hands of CEOs, leaders, and managers to bang the learning drum.

### *Bite-size takeaway:*

It's on leadership teams to create that valuable culture of learning!



It's up to CEOs and leadership teams to bang the drum for the value of learning and development.

## 6. Part of recruitment and retention strategies

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Unfortunately, it's not enough to simply deliver a learning and development strategy; you also need to shout about it. Why?

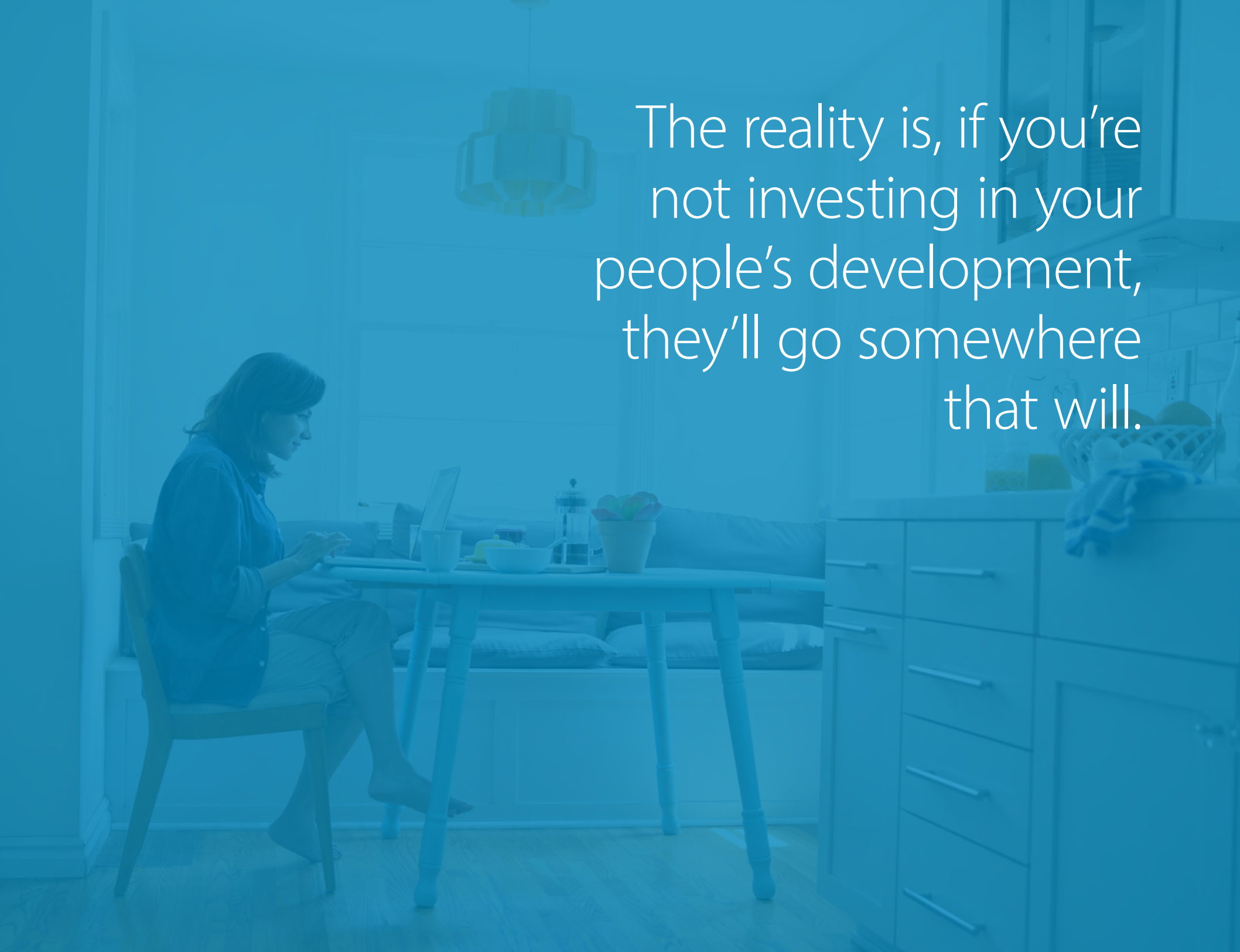
By now, we've learned that personal development is paramount to today's workforce. If you want to attract, develop and retain top-performing employees, emphasize your organization's commitment to invest in their continuous development .

[94%](#) of employees would stay longer if companies invested in their development and, according to Forbes, *over [55%](#) of employees consider career growth and opportunity more important than salary.* We'll say that again: more important than salary.

The reality is, if organizations aren't investing in their people's development, they'll lose them to an organization that will. We all know that it's expensive to replace a hire. Some reports claim it can cost half the salary of the leaver... and sometimes even more.

### *Bite-sized takeaway:*

Development is a key 'want' from workers. Help your customers shout about their L&D plans.

A woman with dark hair is sitting on a wooden chair at a white table in a kitchen. She is looking down at a laptop on the table. On the table, there is also a bowl of fruit, a water bottle, and some papers. In the background, there is a window with a white frame and a white cabinet. The entire image has a blue tint.

The reality is, if you're not investing in your people's development, they'll go somewhere that will.



# Conclusion

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In a constantly changing world, organizations need to have robust learning and development plans to keep pace with the new status quo. Emerging technologies, an increase in remote working, and an ever-shifting workforce demographic are all trends that will directly impact the way organizations create and expand their learning culture.

To paraphrase a recent article from [Forbes](#): more than \$300 billion is spent on corporate training and education each year... but one survey has found that *only 8% of CEOs saw a business impact from learning and development*. We can't just throw money at the problem and check out – what we offer in our learning and development strategy needs to be scrutinized every step of the way.

As demand for professional development increases, so should L&D professional's efforts to ensure learning is accessible, engaging, and impactful.

# How Insights can help you to support your clients' learning and development strategy

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Learning and Talent Development Professionals find themselves asking, how can I help my clients create an L&D strategy that helps to:

- **Build strong relationships and bring the human into a hybrid world**
- **Increase effective communication and build resilient teams**
- **Develop sales teams that understand the demands of our customers**
- **Bring authentic leaders to the forefront and effectively lead hybrid teams**

At Insights, we are committed to helping you empower your clients while building a booming business.

We believe that self-awareness is the key to unlocking the potential of your customers. Once people understand themselves better – and can truly bring their whole selves to work – it enhances everything from teamwork, communication, productivity, and inspirational leadership.

**Learn more about becoming an Insights Partner - contact us today!**



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# About Insights

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We are a people development company that works with companies all over the world to improve the effectiveness of individuals and organizations. The core of our solutions is self-awareness, which is the foundation on which many soft skills are built, including communication, collaboration and relationship-building.

We've built our content on verified psychology and we've made it so vibrant that people instantly find it easy to use and apply. The language and model are based on four colors, with memorable descriptors that help learners quickly relate. Beyond that, we make learning personal and human, encouraging each individual to make a positive difference through their behaviors and actions. Through this approach, we've already made a difference to more than five million learners.

Find out more about how we help customers face their business challenges at [www.insights.com](http://www.insights.com) or contact us right now at [solutions@insights.com](mailto:solutions@insights.com).

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