Effective approaches to corporate learning

How organizations can help employees to strengthen their skills during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond

▶ The way people work and learn has changed dramatically in recent years – and even more over the past months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees expect more participation, self-organization, and flexibility at work.

▶ Organizations need to develop a concept that fosters continuous learning, strengthens the acceptance for learning sessions during working hours, and encourages employees to spend more time on learning and sharing their learning outcomes with colleagues.

▶ This Communication Snapshot outlines why workplace learning is gaining in importance and introduces effective learning methods that are also easy to apply.

The importance of learning at work

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization and has also fostered **new ways of working.** Video conferences have become the new standard to connect with colleagues remotely. Communication tools such as Slack or Microsoft Teams have become increasingly important for collaborating with colleagues and learning from each other. To institutionalize these new developments, a holistic New Work concept is needed – a concept which promotes more flexibility, participation, and co-determination of employees, and which also facilitates **corporate learning** – whether that's from home or at the office.

Without skilled employees, organizations struggle to innovate and grow their businesses. Therefore, organizations should consider the propensity to learn as one of the most important skills in employees. The **ECM,** European Communication Monitor 2020, found that four out of five communication practitioners in Europe believe that there is a great **need for the continued development of competencies.**[*1] This in turn requires a comprehensive personnel concept that fosters the development of critical new skills and continuous learning.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that 83% of communication **professionals expect development programs at the organizational level.**[*1] The Voice of the Learner Report by GP Strategies, a global provider of learning services, found that 44% of employees had left an organization because there weren't enough opportunities for them to develop their skills.[*2]

For companies, it is important to look beyond traditional learning methods. Formats such as on-site trainings become cumbersome if a company has many employees who work from different locations or from home. Today, **virtual learning tools** – which allow employees to access training from anywhere at any time – are in demand.

Learning methods that are easy to apply

Organizations increasingly rely on their own employees to develop colleagues' skills and external trainers have become less important. For this reason, organizations have set out to draft new concepts for developing the skills of their own employees and close skill gaps. In demand are learning methods that create **new ways to learn from each other and enable digital learning from home**.

Microlearning/learning nuggets: This type of learning delivers new insights or helps to build new skills in small units and within a few minutes. These short learning sessions can be used as a stand-alone approach or as one of many learning assets in a module. Microlearning is used in various forms, e.g. short learning videos or quizzes. This learning method has proved to be successful at Continental.

Working circles: Three to five employees get together in small groups or 'circles' and meet in person or virtually for a limited period of time. Each employee contributes their individual goals, which are discussed and pursued in a safe space. Circles are self-organized and based on the intrinsic motivation of the participants. Working circles have become well known through the Working Out Loud approach practiced by Bosch and Daimler.

(Reverse) Mentoring: An experienced mentor passes on knowledge and shares their experience with a mentee – regardless of hierarchy and age. Young professionals, for example, can have expertise in the areas of IT and social media. There are various forms of mentoring, e.g. specialist-expert, career-related, interdisciplinary, and intercultural mentoring. Virtual mentoring can work just as well as in-person mentoring and also has the advantage that participants are not tied to one place.

Job shadowing: Employees accompany other colleagues during their daily work over a fixed period of time (e.g. one day) and observe their tasks and working routines. The aim is to learn new aspects related to the organization and to better understand the jobs and challenges that are faced by colleagues.

"Learning ability is key in constantly adapting to new situations and in successfully mastering challenges with innovative solutions."

Dr. Felix Gress
Senior Vice President Communication & Public Affairs, Continental AG

Job rotation: Employees change to a different position or function, either regularly or for a specific period of time. They switch perspectives and get a broader understanding of the organization. By allowing employees to test themselves in other disciplines, organizations can reduce silo thinking and mitigate employee fatigue.

But what are the **most important new methods**? A study on digital learning by the mmb Institute, which focuses on media and competence research, revealed that 1. explanatory videos, 2. microlearning and 3. blended learning are looking to become the most important learning methods in the coming years.[3]

more, self-assessments, AI-based assessments, and peer-reviewing are becoming increasingly important.

Not enough time to learn?

Employees often report that they are aware of the importance of learning but don't have time for it. A survey of more than 700 employees in Germany revealed that two out of three employees say they lack the time to learn. **Two-thirds state that they do not have sufficient time, resources, or the tools for further training.**[4] To counteract this, organizations should create the best possible conditions:

- ▶ Provide **sufficient resources** – financially and timewise.
- ▶ Provide adequate learning **tools**, e.g. an employee competence database to connect colleagues who want to learn from each other.
- ▶ Strengthen the **acceptance** for learning sessions during working hours and encourage employees to plan fixed learning times.
- ▶ Integrate learning achievements into **performance assessments**.
- ▶ Provide employees with information about the **roles and skills** that are increasingly in demand so that they can self-direct their learning and career choices.

Most important learning methods in organizations in the coming years

Method	Percentage
Videos	94%
Microlearning/learning nuggets	92%
Blended learning	90%
Apps	87%
Webinars	79%
Web based trainings	62%
Social networks/communities	57%
Adaptive learning	52%
Augmented reality	49%
Chatbots	49%
Simulations	48%
Virtual 3D worlds	30%
Messaging services	23%
Serious games	13%

■ significant as a learning method
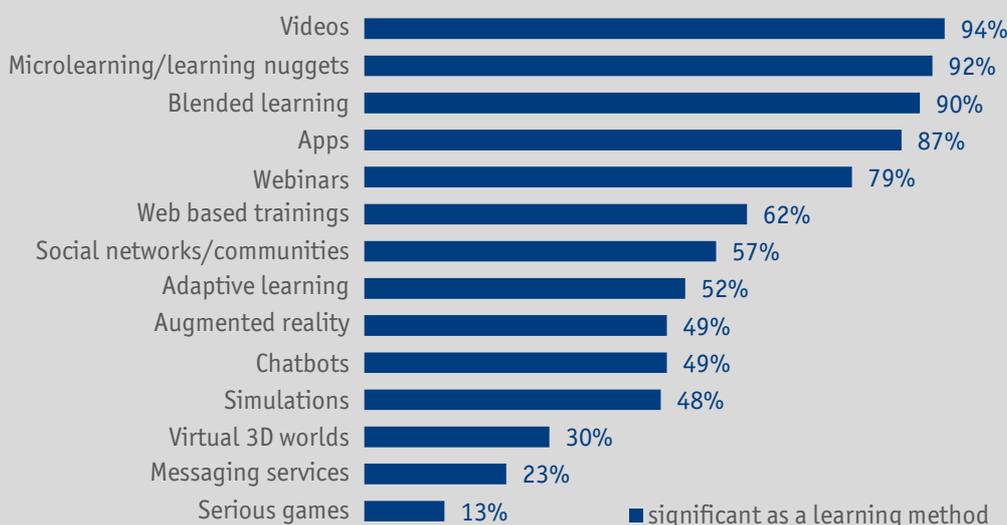
mmb Learning Delphi, 2020 (A study on digital learning since 2006 by the mmb Institute, which focuses on media and competence research); n = 60-61 e-learning experts from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

Learning individually or in a group?

Workplace learning can be both an individual or a shared activity. The study by GP Strategies found that **70% of employees prefer to learn with others** - be it in a group, online, offline, or in one-on-one conversations.[2] Therefore, organizations should not lose sight of the fact that shared experiences and learning together are important for employees. Organizations should encourage employees to share their excitement about what they are learning. Further-

Keep in mind that not all employees may perceive learning as a positive practice. On the contrary, it can also be felt as a burden and stressful obligation. Employees may experience being left on their own. Thus, it is up to the organization to create a positive perception and sufficient support for corporate learning.

Sources:
1) Zerfass et al. (2020): European Communication Monitor
2) GP Strategies (2019): Voice of the Learner Report
3) mmb Institut (2020): mmb-Trendmonitor 2019/2020
4) Personalwirtschaft (2019): Zwei von drei Arbeitnehmern fehlt die Zeit zum Lernen