

Learning & Development Trends Report

Development Budgets: Where Strategic Intent Translates into Structural Reality

A large majority of organizations today articulate a strong narrative around employee development. According to the WEF Future of Jobs Report, companies have significant expectations from their learning investments: increasing organizational productivity (77%), strengthening competitiveness (70%), and improving employee engagement (65%). In this sense, development budgets are no longer viewed as a peripheral activity, but as a strategic lever expected to directly influence business performance.

However, the extent to which these expectations translate into “reality” within organizations is closely linked to how development budgets are designed and how effectively they are utilized throughout the year. While allocating a dedicated line for learning and development in annual plans may initially signal strong ownership, this alone is not sufficient. The critical question is whether this budget is actively mobilized, or whether it ultimately turns into a statement of intent that remains partially or fully unused by year-end.

Do you have a dedicated budget allocated for employee development and learning activities?

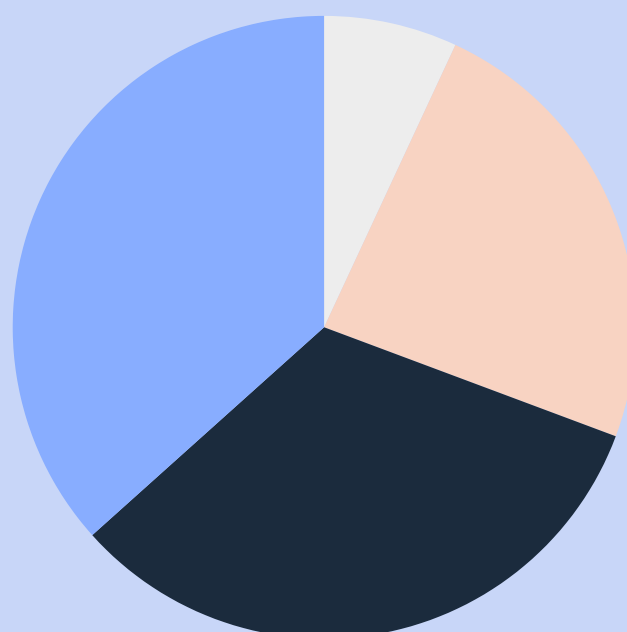
Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



- No
26%
- Yes, we have a defined per-employee learning budget
55%
- Yes, we have a shared company-wide development budget
18%

How is your learning and development budget managed?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



- A shared budget pool, used as needs arise
37%
- No defined approach / ad-hoc decisions
33%
- A hybrid model combining individual and shared budgets
24%
- A per-employee budget with individual usage rights
7%

Budget Exists, but Structure Remains Unclear

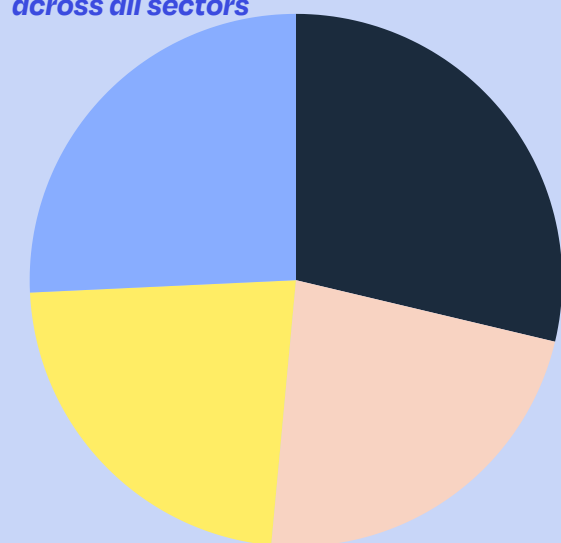
Research findings indicate that some companies allocate a company-wide development budget, while others offer a per-employee entitlement. However, what stands out is that a significant proportion still report using hybrid models or having no clearly defined approach. Organizations providing individual, per-employee budgets remain in the minority; while the shared pool approach is common, it is not always sensitive to individual learning needs. In addition, the share of organizations stating that their approach is “ad hoc” is not insignificant. This suggests that while the presence of a budget signals strategic intent, implementation has not yet reached a sufficient level of structural maturity.

Managing a highly individualized process such as employee development solely through a shared budget pool does not consistently deliver the expected impact. While it offers scale advantages, planning that does not address individual job objectives, skill gaps, or role transitions can limit the potential of the allocated budget.

Where Intent Becomes Reality: Budget Utilization Levels

To what extent were you able to utilize the training budget planned for employees in 2025?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



- Used at a very low level
29%
- Partially used
22%
- Used at a moderate level
23%
- Most of the budget was used
26%

The extent to which development budgets are actually utilized throughout the year provides an important indicator of how diversity in budget design translates into practice. Research results show that some organizations are able to activate their budgets only to a limited extent. In most cases, this is less about the size of the budget and more about how much space the processes that mobilize the budget are given within the organization.

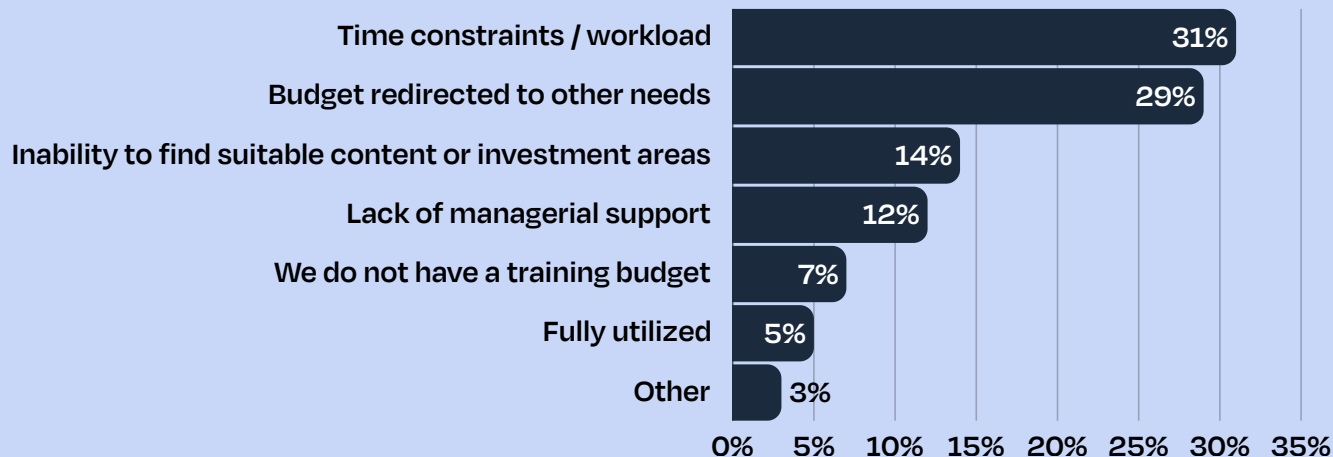
There are several familiar barriers behind low utilization levels: time constraints, workload intensity, difficulties in accessing relevant content, and managers not consistently supporting learning processes. At this point, the role of managers is particularly critical. According to Bravely's Navigating the Future of L&D / Insights and Trends (2022) study, 26% of HR leaders state that they are unable to secure sufficient senior leadership buy-in for L&D initiatives. This finding shows that budget effectiveness is shaped not only by operational capacity, but also by ownership at the leadership level.

In addition, the structural burdens HR teams face while managing budgets are also noteworthy. Findings from Oxford Economics & SAP indicate that 44% of HR budgets are spent on “not particularly critical” activities, and that especially in mid-sized organizations, legacy systems keep teams tied up in intensive operational processes. This highlights that directing resources allocated to L&D toward meaningful impact is not always straightforward.

When these indicators are considered together, it becomes clear that the utilization level of development budgets is not merely a performance metric, but also an indirect signal of how much space an organization truly creates for learning. Even when a budget exists, if the processes, priorities, and managerial ownership required to activate it are not clearly defined, allocated resources naturally tend to produce limited impact.

What was the biggest barrier to fully utilizing the planned budget?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



The Core Question: How Much Space Does the Organization Create for Learning?

This overall picture shows that a development budget represents more than simply “money allocated for learning.” It points to something far more fundamental: the extent to which learning is embedded in organizational life. No matter how strong the strategic intent may be, how the budget is structured, how actively it is mobilized throughout the year, and how it is owned by leadership ultimately become the determining factors. The scale advantage provided by shared pools remains limited if not complemented by individual needs; similarly, even the most carefully planned budgets fail to reach their potential without managerial support or process clarity. For this reason, development budgets have become a critical area that demonstrates how organizations translate future vision into operational reality. Organizations that are effective differentiate themselves not by increasing budgets, but by turning budgets into learning environments where they can truly function. Ultimately, what enables sustainable performance is precisely this: an organizational approach that takes ownership of resources, clarifies processes, and creates space for learning within everyday work

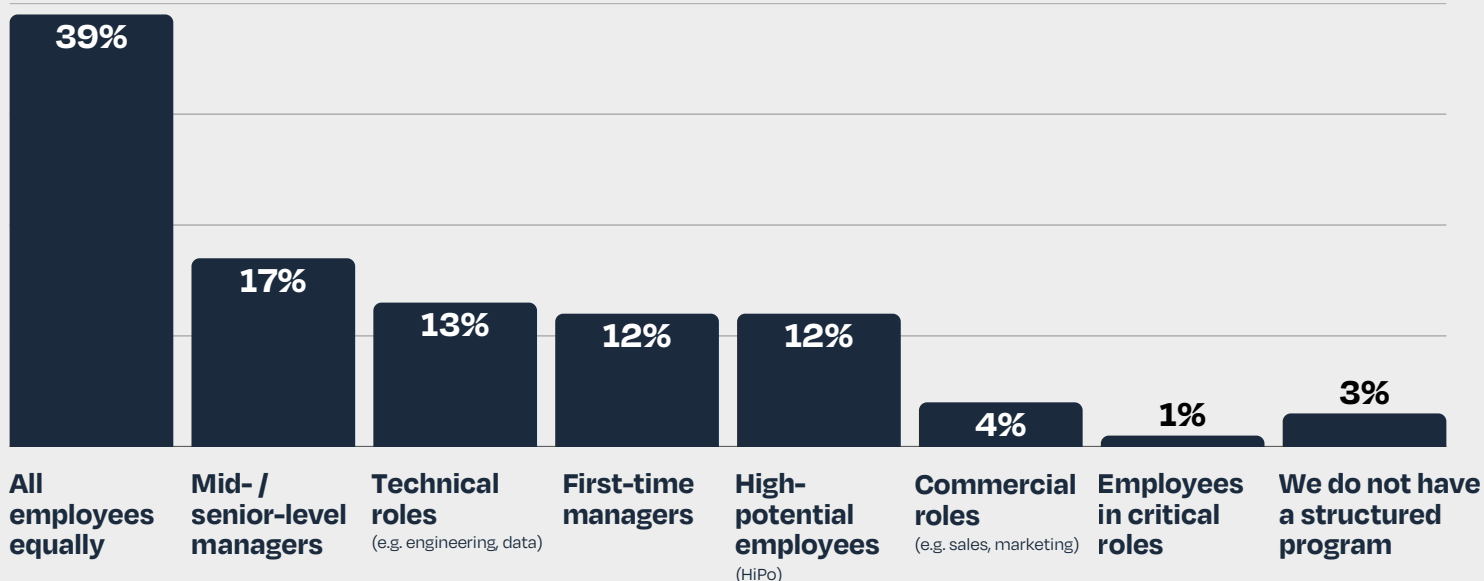
Who Do Learning Resources Reach: Without Structure, Access Remains Limited

Beyond designing the budget correctly, the accessibility and inclusiveness of learning resources are among the key factors shaping an organization’s learning capacity. At this point, a critical question emerges: who does the allocated budget actually reach, and how are learning opportunities distributed within the organization?

The data shows that structured, role-based learning pathways are largely absent across organizations. While 60% of participants state that such pathways do not exist, only 15% report that these pathways are available to all employees. This picture indicates that learning in most organizations still progresses at the level of individual effort and managerial goodwill, rather than being translated into a formal organizational architecture.

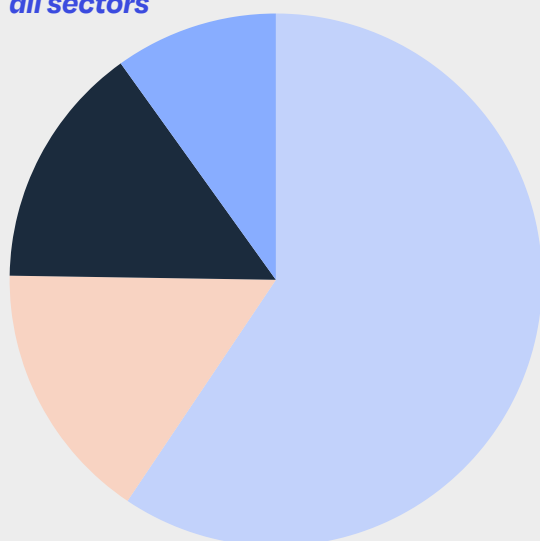
Who receives the most structured L&D support in your organization?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



Do you have structured, role-based learning pathways in your organization?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



A similar concentration is observed when examining who receives structured L&D support. Although 39% of organizations report providing equal support to all employees, mid- and senior-level managers (17%), technical roles (13%), and HiPo employees (11.8%) receive more structured support. This distribution suggests that learning is treated less as an organizational right and more as a strategic investment targeted toward specific positions.

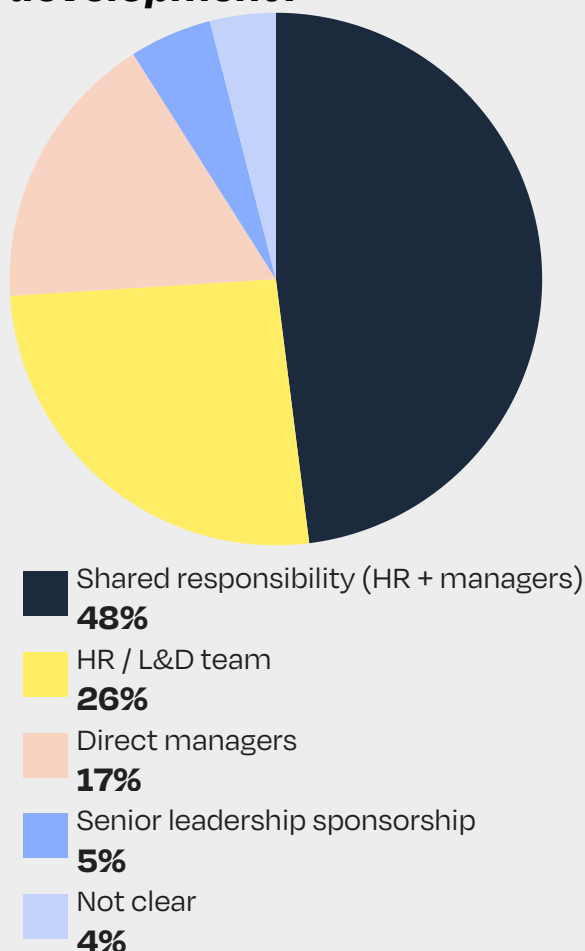
As a result, when a structured learning architecture is not established, it becomes unclear who learning opportunities reach, and strategic investments fail to generate the expected impact. The real power of learning lies not only in the content offered, but in who receives it, when it is delivered, and in what context.

Another important point to highlight here is the chain of responsibility within the learning process. Competency development is often left to individual motivation or incidental opportunities. However, for learning to evolve into an institutionalized system, role definitions, responsibilities, and ownership need to be clearly articulated.

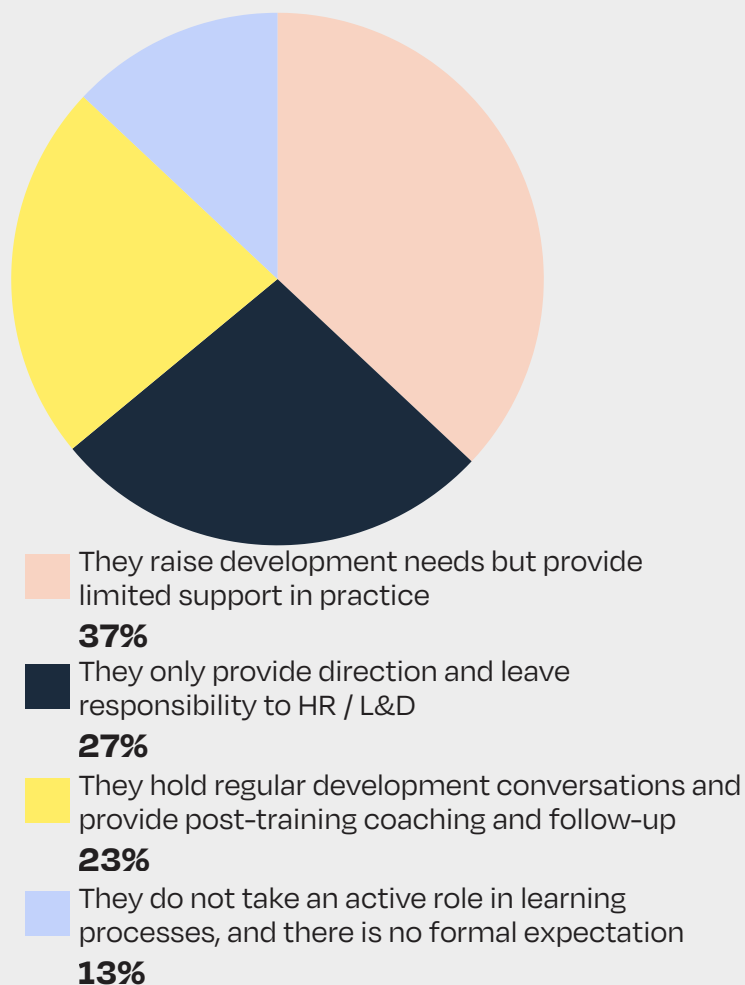
Who Owns Development?: How Can a Shared Responsibility Model Be Deepened

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors

In your organization, who is responsible for employee development?



What role do managers play in employee learning?



Findings related to the design and utilization of development budgets clearly show how much space organizations create for learning. However, beyond budgets, there is another equally important element: who these learning opportunities reach within the organization, how they are accessed, and according to what logic. At a certain point, the question naturally shifts here: who owns organizational development: the organization, managers, or the individual employee?

The data indicates that this question has not yet been clearly resolved within organizations. The lack of systematic learning pathways leads development to progress largely through individual effort and managerial initiative. In such an environment, employees increasingly assume responsibility themselves; according to the PwC Workforce report, 74% of employees believe that updating their skills is their own responsibility. While this individual ownership is important, its impact remains limited without strong organizational structures and managerial support. In other words, employees are internalizing learning expectations at an increasing rate, but the supporting organizational systems are not evolving at the same pace.

When examining who receives structured L&D support, this tension becomes even more visible. While 39% of organizations state that they provide equal support to all employees, mid- and senior-level managers (16.9%), technical roles (12.5%), and HiPo employees (11.8%) receive more structured support. This picture suggests that learning is positioned not as an employee entitlement, but as an investment directed toward selected roles.

A similar pattern is observed on the leadership side. Ownership of learning responsibility within the organization remains unclear. Only 23% report that managers regularly engage in development conversations with employees and provide coaching, while a significant portion offer only surface-level support or take on no role at all. This points to a gap where individual learning effort fails to meet institutional support. Data from the LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2025 further shows that this gap has widened over the past year: the share of managers encouraging employees to allocate time for learning has declined from 35% to 30%, support for learning new skills has dropped from 28% to 23%, and recommendations of learning materials have decreased from 25% to 18%.

From an organizational standpoint, the pattern remains consistent. When examining barriers to career development, LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2025 data indicates that 50% of respondents believe managers lack sufficient capability to provide support, 45% say employees are not adequately supported, and 33% report that talent teams lack the necessary capacity. Leadership unwillingness does not appear among the top three barriers, suggesting that the issue stems more from system design than from intent.

This structural gap is reflected not only in day-to-day practices, but also in how organizations design their learning and capability development strategies. Even in organizations that prioritize career development, a strong analytical and managerial collaboration is required for learning systems to function effectively. Data from the LinkedIn Workplace Learning 2025 report shows that only about half of organizations are able to track skill gaps using internal data (49%), similarly only 48% have established clear career pathways, and 45% are able to align development programs with business strategy in collaboration with managers. These figures indicate that learning architecture has not yet been fully institutionalized, and that despite strong intent, structures and processes continue to lag behind in many organizations.

Learning Requires Ownership, Not Just Momentum

When these two perspectives are considered together, the picture becomes clear. While employees increasingly perceive learning and skill development as their own responsibility, organizations struggle to take systematic ownership of learning. As a result, learning is promoted, but not yet fully owned at the organizational level.

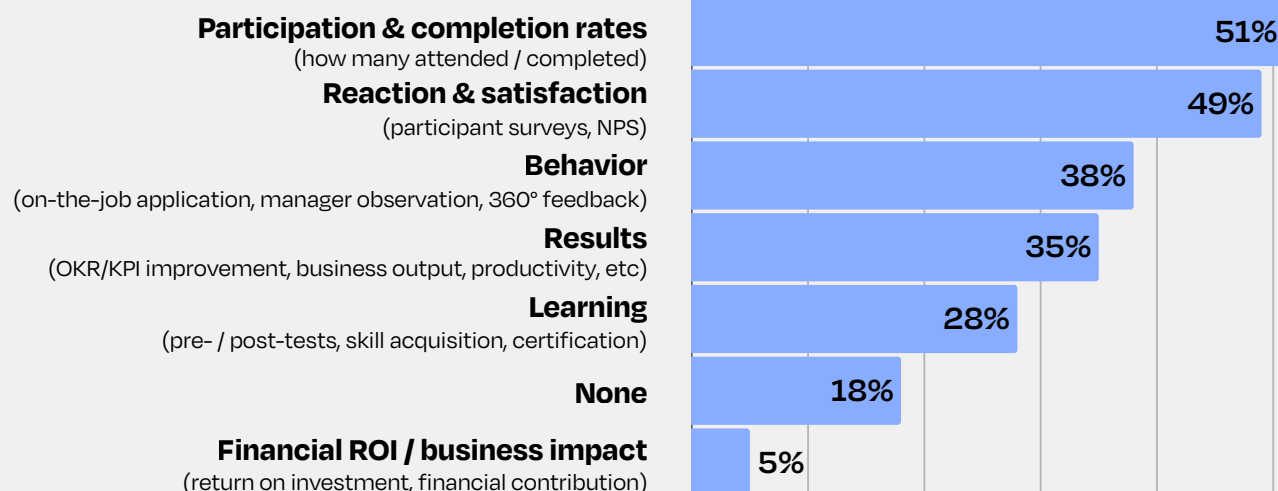
When systems are not in place, it becomes unclear who learning opportunities reach. When roles and responsibilities remain undefined, development processes rely on individual motivation and incidental opportunities. Yet the real impact of learning is shaped not by content alone, but by context, processes, and ownership. For this reason, redesigning organizational learning architectures requires clear answers to key questions: who is learning what and why, who owns the process, and where it begins and ends.

Without clear answers, investments remain limited to well intentioned initiatives rather than enabling structural transformation. The next critical step is to assess whether these efforts create value, and how learning and development investments translate into organizational performance and measurable impact.

Measurement, Impact, and Performance

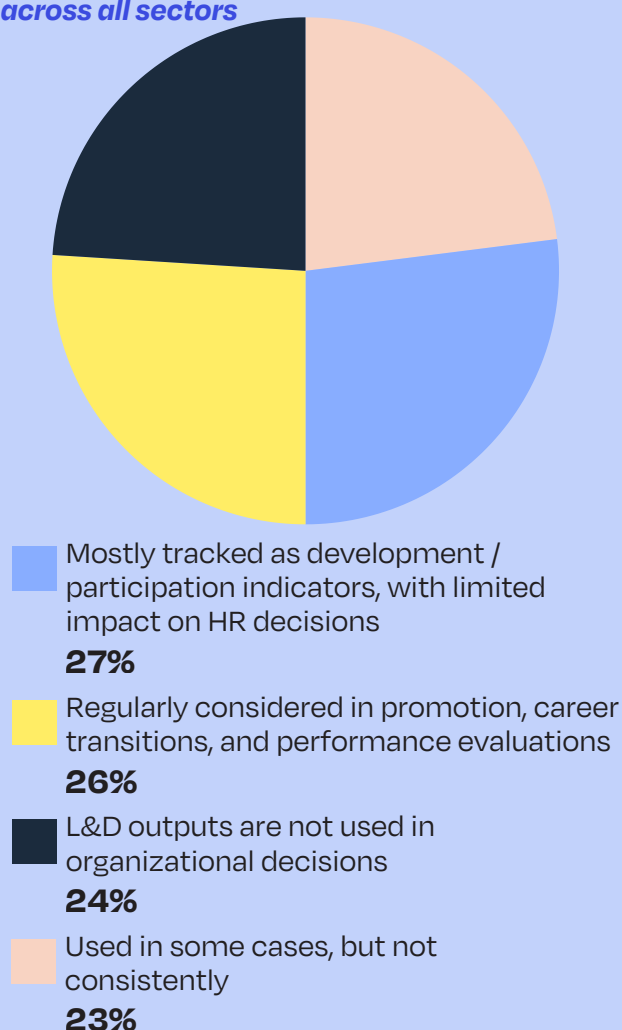
At which levels do you measure the impact of your L&D programs?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



To what extent are the outputs of your L&D programs used in organizational processes?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



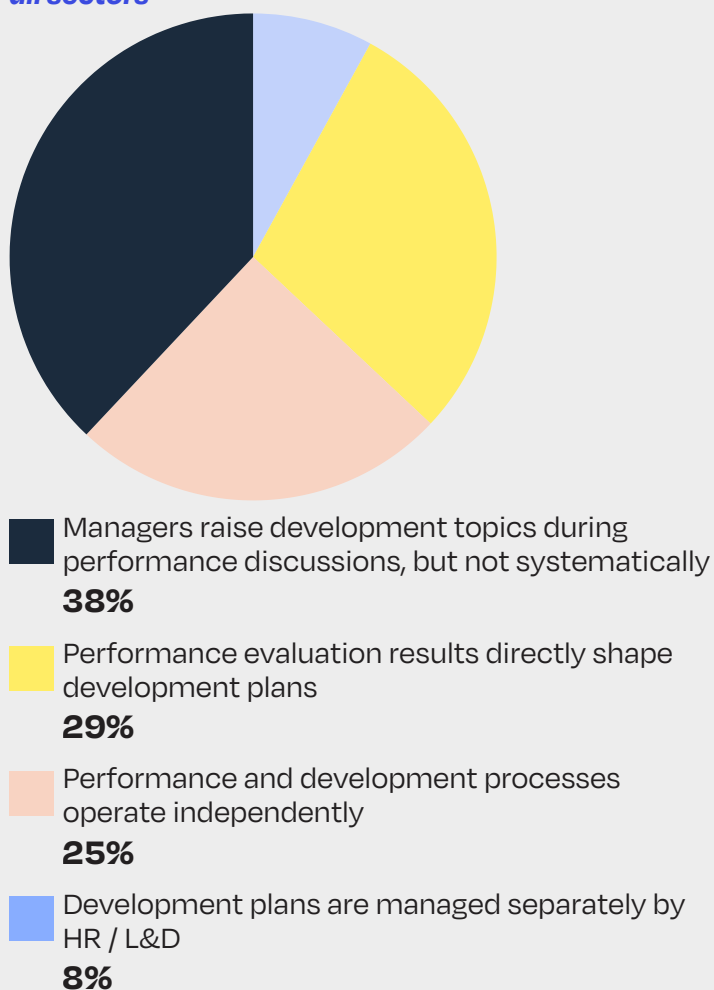
How Deeply Is Learning Embedded in Organizational Memory?

The way to understand whether a development budget is designed effectively ultimately comes down to a single question: where, how, and to what extent does learning create value within the organization? The true impact of a program is not defined by how many people participate, but by how meaningfully it informs organizational decisions.

Research findings show that while organizations do measure learning outcomes, these measurements often translate only minimally into strategic processes. Fifty-one percent of respondents measure success through participation rates, and 49% rely on satisfaction scores. By contrast, more strategic indicators such as behavior change (38%), improvement in business outcomes (35%), and financial ROI (5%) are tracked far less frequently. This gap points to a space where the “value” of learning is felt, but its “impact” is not made visible.

How are employee development processes linked to performance management in your organization?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



This is not merely a local observation; global research confirms the same pattern. According to WEF Future of Jobs 2025 data, 77% of organizations expect productivity gains from training investments, 70% expect improved competitiveness, and 65% expect higher employee retention. Despite these expectations, measurement approaches still rely predominantly on surface-level metrics. In short, organizations expect strategic outcomes, but the measurement infrastructure required to make those outcomes visible has not yet reached the same level of maturity.

How Visible Are L&D Outputs in Decision-Making Processes?

This gap becomes even more apparent when examining how L&D outputs feed into organizational decisions. Only 26% of responses indicate that development outcomes are regularly used as a data point in promotion decisions, career transitions, and performance evaluations. Twenty-seven percent track these outputs merely as participation indicators, while 24% do not evaluate them at all. This picture shows that in many organizations, learning is still positioned as a “supporting activity”; strategic impact emerges only when learning outputs actively inform decision mechanisms.

The Disconnect Between Performance Systems and Learning

When this issue is reflected in performance management processes, the situation becomes even more critical. Only 29% of participants state that performance evaluations directly shape development plans. In 38% of organizations, managers may raise development topics, but the process is not systematic; in 25%, performance and development progress entirely separately.

The global perspective reinforces this view. According to McKinsey & Company's HR Monitor 2025, based on HR interviews conducted in Europe, only 20% of organizations effectively connect performance management outputs with L&D processes. Yet most of the outcomes organizations expect productivity, competitiveness, and engagement remain largely invisible unless this connection is strengthened.

Where Are Measurement Systems Evolving?

Measurement is critical for understanding learning impact; however, how measurement is conducted directly reflects organizational maturity. Leadership development provides a strong reference point in this regard. According to findings from the HBI Global Leadership Report 2025, organizations have begun using far more advanced data sets to evaluate leadership impact. Employee surveys (62%), 360-degree feedback (60%), development indicators (57%), and non-financial performance outcomes (50%) are now widely tracked.

The use of AI has also become an important part of this measurement approach. Fifty-eight percent of organizations use AI to generate data-driven insights, while 53% leverage AI to measure and track progress. These figures are expected to increase in the coming period.

These examples show that organizations are no longer satisfied with simply asking whether learning has occurred. The real question has shifted to this: what kind of change has learning created within the organization?

Learning Impact Becomes Visible When It Connects with Performance

When all these data points are considered together, a clear conclusion emerges. Unless learning strategies are connected to performance, they create value primarily for individuals, not for the organization. Leading companies, however, view development not as an “additional function” but as a performance lever that sustains business continuity and strengthens competitive capacity.

Three core transformation areas stand out in this context.

Strategic alignment:

Requires development goals to move in the same direction as organizational objectives.

Managerial ownership:

Requires managers to evolve from merely raising development topics to actively integrating development into performance systems.

Effective measurement:

Requires learning outputs to move beyond being tracked and become active data points in organizational decision-making processes.

In short, the true power of development programs lies not in content, but in their visibility within organizational decision mechanisms. When performance and learning do not meet at the same table, both remain below their potential. For this reason, one of the most practical ways to assess how effectively an organization manages learning investments is to examine how those investments translate into business decisions. As the need for performance and learning to sit at the same table becomes increasingly clear, the next inevitable question emerges: how can we tell whether learning is truly translating into work outcomes?

Would you like to make your training and development programs truly measurable?

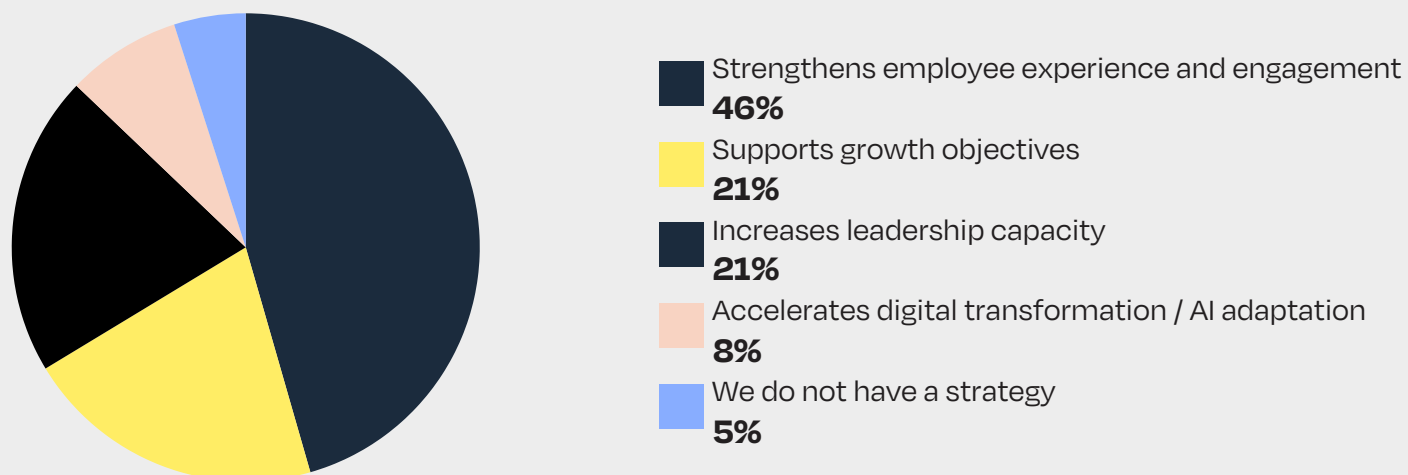
We are launching a dedicated learning series for early-career HR and Learning & Development professionals. This series will offer a practical path to aligning development with goals, building the right measurement frameworks, and designing behavior-focused programs. Lumolead will bring you together with experienced industry leaders to give you direct exposure to how the work is done in practice.

To access reports, guides, and toolkits designed specifically for HR and Learning & Development teams, and to be notified when registrations open, join our monthly email list.

Join Our Email List

How is your L&D strategy directly connected to the CEO/CHRO agenda?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



The Power of L&D Lies Not Only in Content, but in Governance

After discussing how learning is designed, measured, and linked to performance, the question naturally shifts to governance: how is this strategy anchored in the organization's top agenda? Because the real impact of L&D emerges through its alignment with the organization's strategic priorities.

Research findings show that employee development is no longer viewed solely as an "HR initiative," but as a transformation area that has secured a place in senior-level governance. 46% of participants state that L&D strategies are directly connected to the CEO and CHRO agenda. In other words, development, engagement, performance, and cultural transformation are now monitored at the highest organizational level. Two separate groups, each representing 21%, emphasize that L&D supports growth objectives and leadership capacity.

A similar pattern appears in global research. In LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report 2025, organizations identified as "Career Development Champions" reach a 45% rate of aligning skill development programs with business strategy through close collaboration with managers and senior leaders, compared to 32% in other organizations. This indicates that organizations with higher maturity levels have made positioning learning at the center of strategy a standard practice.

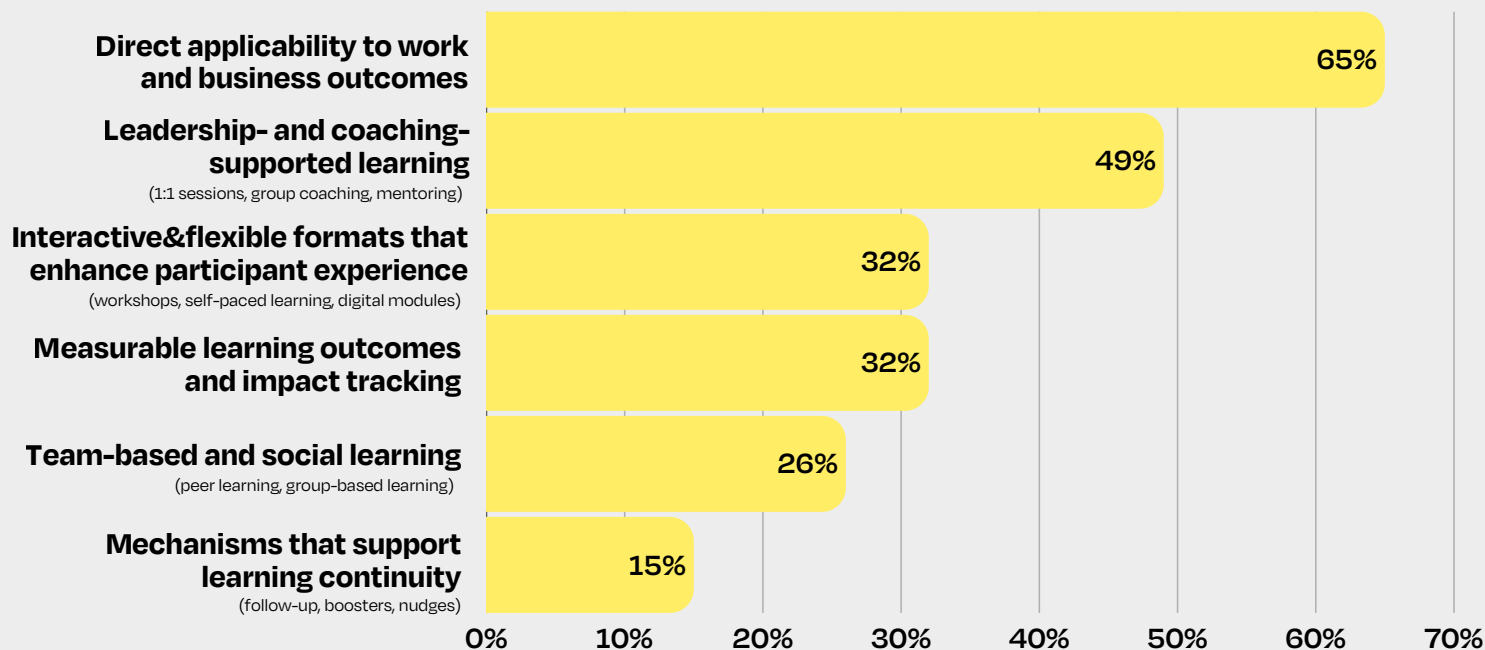
However, strategic ownership has not eliminated inconsistencies in practice. In our research, only 39% state that development opportunities reach all employees equally. The limited availability of programs for technical roles, new managers, and high-potential employees indicates that the connection between L&D and talent management still requires strengthening. Moreover, only 5% of organizations identify managers as the primary owners of development, suggesting that development remains centrally managed and that managerial ownership has not yet been fully internalized.

This picture highlights 3 core focus areas. First, development opportunities need to be distributed more evenly across roles and levels, as unequal access limits the strategic impact of L&D. Second, governance structures need greater clarity. As long as role ambiguity persists between L&D teams, managers, and employees, development processes remain constrained by individual effort. Finally, learning objectives must be more strongly linked to business goals. Development becomes a true transformation lever only when it is embedded in the organization's strategic agenda. When these areas are strengthened, L&D evolves from a function that delivers training into an architecture that carries the organization's competitive strength and transformation capacity.

How Are Priorities Shaped in Learning and Development Programs?

Which features do you prioritize most in your learning and development programs?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



Our research shows that 65% of participants state that the most important factor in learning programs is direct applicability to work and business outcomes. This finding clearly demonstrates that organizational learning is no longer positioned as a “knowledge transfer process,” but as an infrastructure for value creation.

Today, learning investments are measured not only through individual development, but through business transformation. The translation of knowledge into behavior, and behavior into performance, in other words, learning’s tangible reflection in daily workflows has become the primary responsibility of learning design. For this reason, programs increasingly stand out not for theoretical content, but for their ability to offer workflow-integrated, timely, and contextual solutions.

When learning formats are examined, leadership- and coaching-supported learning (49%) and flexible, interactive models (32%) draw particular attention. However, the value of these tools is again defined by the strength of their connection to work. Similarly, the measurability of learning outcomes (32%) reinforces organizations’ need to make impact visible.

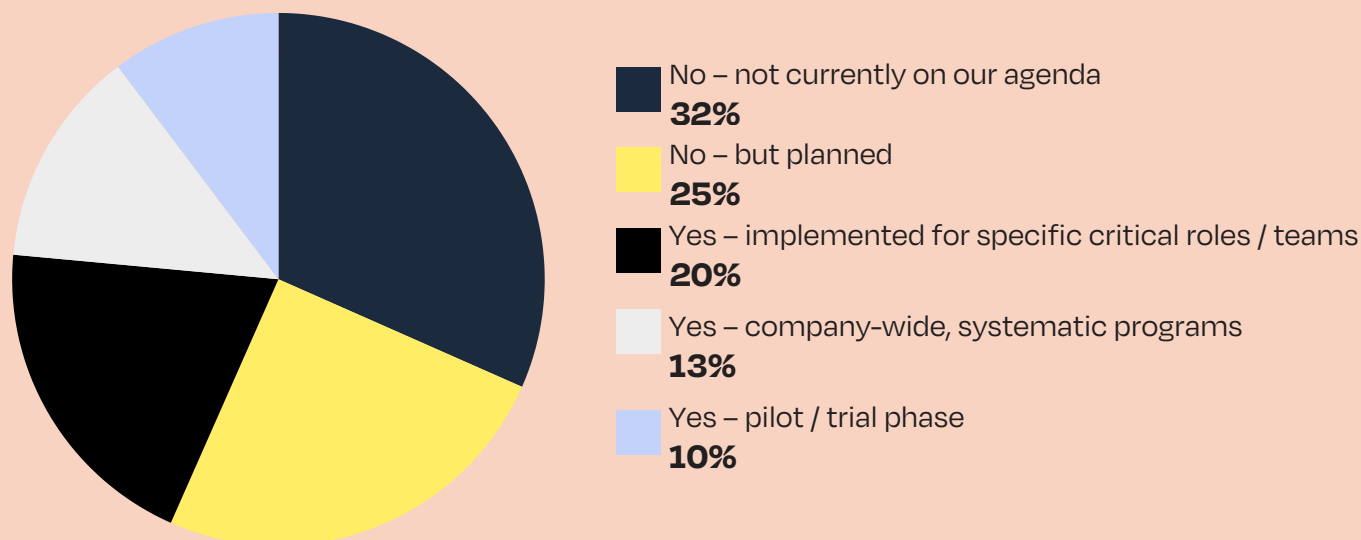
The relatively low importance assigned to mechanisms that support learning continuity (15%), which rank lowest in the chart, creates an interesting contradiction. While organizations prioritize factors that increase impact such as applicability, coaching, and measurement, they do not sufficiently prioritize follow-up and reinforcement steps that ensure lasting transformation.

The overall trend is clear: organizations are no longer looking for “training for the sake of training,” but for learning solutions that build skills, change behavior, and directly translate into business outcomes. Applicability has therefore become a new KPI, because real value is measured by how learning is brought to life in the workplace.

Upskilling & Reskilling Strategy

Do you have structured upskilling (developing existing skills) and reskilling (acquiring new skills) programs in your organization?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



Where Does Alignment Break Between Strategy and Intent?

The need for capability transformation within organizations continues to grow, yet the extent to which this need translates into a concrete strategy varies significantly. The data shows that in nearly one-third of organizations, upskilling and reskilling have not yet become a strategic priority. While 43% of organizations report having a structured program, only 13% state that they have been able to systematically roll these strategies out across the entire company. This indicates that capability transformation is still progressing in a fragmented manner at the organizational level.

57%

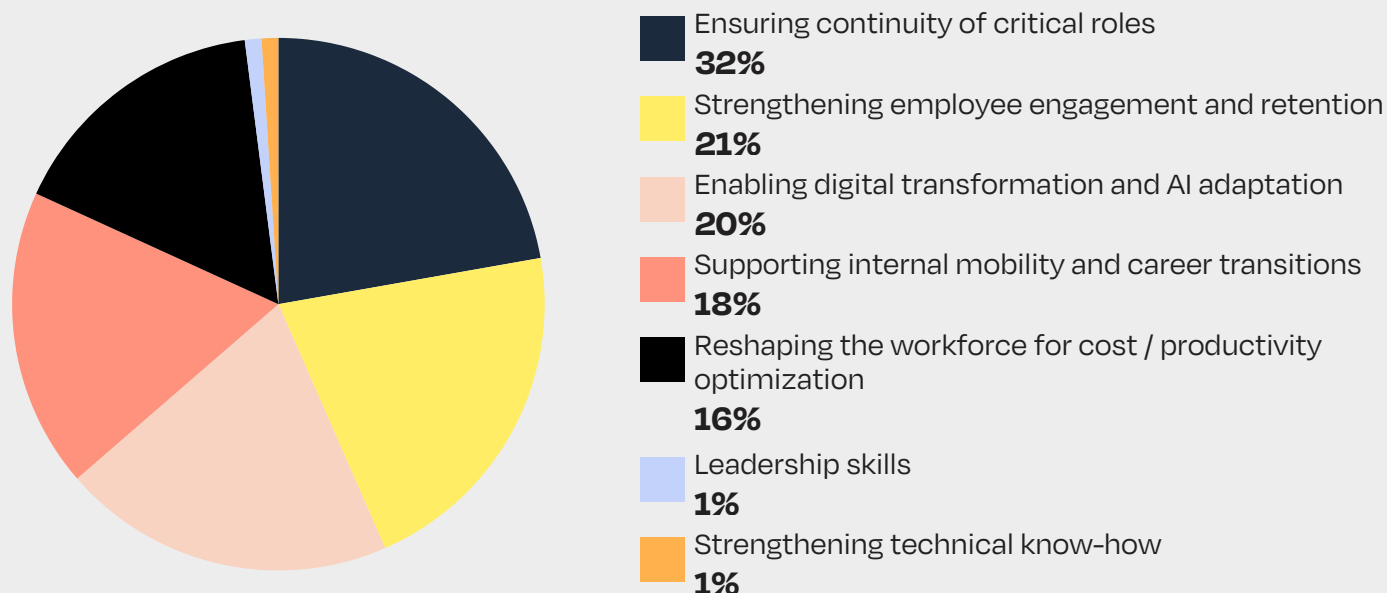
For 57% of companies, upskilling and reskilling are not yet a strategic priority

On the other hand, among organizations that do have a strategy, it is possible to say that upskilling investments are primarily made to ensure the sustainability of critical roles (22%), improve employee engagement (21%), and support AI and digital transformation adaptation (20%). This distribution shows that capability strategies are shaped by efforts to respond to both organizational continuity and cultural transformation needs. However, despite digital transformation and AI adaptation being among the key motivations for upskilling, McLean & Company's HR Trends research indicates that only 11% of organizations have implemented an AI-specific upskilling strategy. This data highlights a clear gap between transformation expectations and execution.

When these findings are considered together, a striking picture emerges. Organizations have strong intentions around transformation, yet sufficient progress has not been made in translating these intentions into a systematic learning architecture. Particularly in areas requiring rapid adaptation, such as generative AI, the risk of losing competitive advantage increases for organizations without a clear strategy.

What purpose do upskilling (developing existing skills) and reskilling (acquiring new skills) primarily serve in your organization?

Based on responses from 94 companies with an upskilling / reskilling strategy



The New Focus of Upskilling: Developing People Who Can Manage Technology

Survey data indicates that organizations are moving their upskilling and reskilling strategies beyond traditional training models. While technical skills alone appear to have relatively lower priority, adaptation to AI and digital transformation stands out as one of the most important motivations at 20%. In addition, 16% focus on productivity and workforce optimization. When these two areas are considered together, it becomes clear that organizations are using capability investments to reposition the human factor in the digital age.

Upskilling is evolving from an approach focused on teaching technology into a transformation aimed at developing people who can work effectively alongside technology. In this shift, the most critical variable is no longer information itself, but context. In an environment where information is easily accessible, the differentiating factor becomes how that information is integrated into processes, culture, and workflows.

In short, upskilling investments are no longer made to enable people to use more technology, but to transform technology in a way that is more human-centered, meaningful, and sustainable. This shows that capability strategies are being treated not merely as training initiatives, but as transformation architectures.

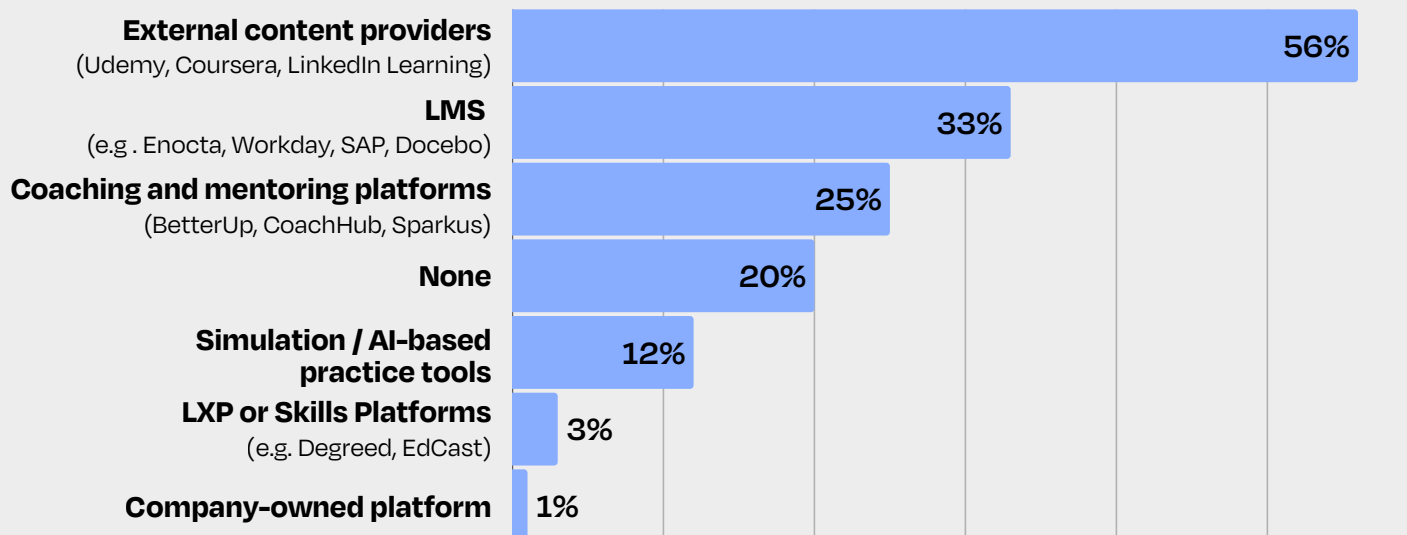
21%

According to McKinsey & Company's HR Monitor 2025 Report, on average only 21% of employees in Europe report having received formal training on the use of generative AI.

The New Threshold of Digital Learning: The Shift from Access to Engagement

Which of the following platforms do you use to support learning?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



Survey findings show that organizations have built strong infrastructure for access to digital learning tools. Fifty-six percent of participants use external content providers such as Udemy, Coursera, and LinkedIn Learning, while 33% use LMS systems. This picture reveals that abundance of digital content is no longer a privilege, but the baseline of corporate learning. However, broad access alone does not create a meaningful learning experience. Today's critical question has shifted: access exists, but what kind of experience does this access turn into?

20%
20% of companies do not support their L&D processes with a platform

A distribution in the chart directly points to this question. The fact that coaching and mentoring platforms are preferred at a rate of 25% shows that organizations are attempting to complement their digital learning architecture not only with content, but also with human-centered interactions. In contrast, the use of LXPs or skills platforms at only 3% suggests that learning is still not fully guided, and that the transition from content discovery to content curation is still at an early stage.

Global data supports this picture. According to findings from the HBI Global Leadership Report, 46% of companies consider integration with digital tools a critical criterion when evaluating leadership development solutions, while 41% view customizable design as essential. In other words, organizations value not only "having a learning platform," but also the connection between platforms, personalization of the learning experience, and alignment with workflows.

This search also makes structural challenges on the technology side more visible. According to SHRM's The Many Costs of HR Software Sprawl 2024 Report, 55% of HR leaders state that their current technology solutions do not meet their needs, data is fragmented due to organizations using an average of 15–50 different HR technologies, and two-thirds of leaders believe that HR effectiveness will decline if technology is not improved. These findings explain why the digital learning experience has not yet reached the desired level of integration.

By contrast, the situation is quite different in digitally mature organizations. According to Oxford Economics & SAP data, companies that effectively use digital HR solutions make decisions 38% faster, simplify processes by 37%, reduce costs by 35.5%, and see employee turnover rates fall to as low as 15% (compared to 25% in traditional structures). This difference shows that the digital learning ecosystem is an infrastructure that transforms not only training processes, but overall business efficiency.

Taken together, this picture signals an important shift in direction. The next phase of digital learning will be defined not by owning technology, but by how that technology shapes the learning experience. Access is already strong; what matters now is contextualization, personalization, and turning learning into something that can genuinely be applied at work. In a period where employees face both content overload and time pressure, the core question organizations must answer is becoming increasingly clear: how does learning move beyond being merely accessible and become an experience that transforms behavior and business outcomes?

The answer to this question also defines where digital learning will create competitive advantage. Because what differentiates organizations now is not “how many platforms are used,” but how meaningfully those platforms are translated into a coherent learning flow.

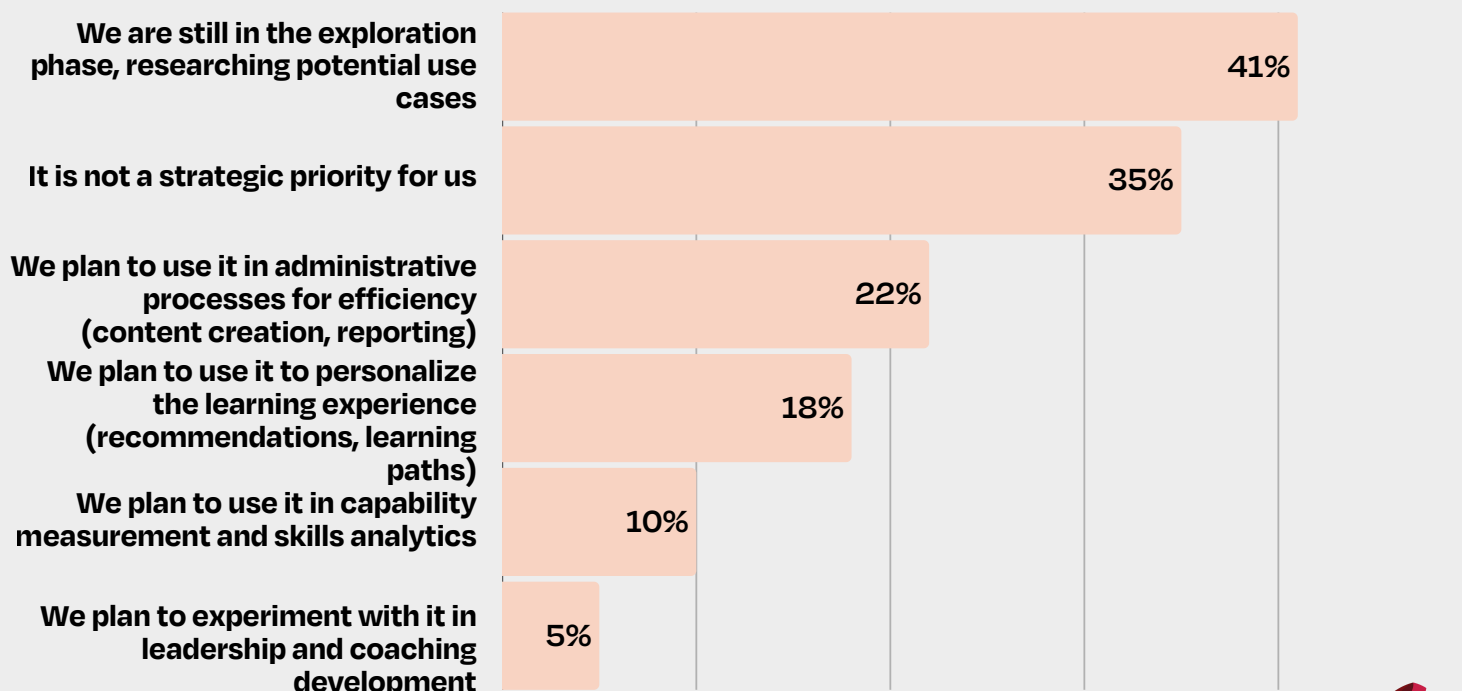
AI: High Potential, but the Journey Is Still at an Early Stage

The role of artificial intelligence within L&D is steadily strengthening, yet the majority of organizations are still in an exploration phase. Forty-one percent of participants state that they are trying to understand how AI should be used. This indicates that organizations are adopting a more deliberate approach focused on identifying the right use cases, rather than rushing to implement AI quickly.

Looking at planned use cases, 22% plan to leverage AI for efficiency in administrative processes such as reporting and automated content creation, 18% for personalized learning pathways, and 10% for capability analytics. This shows that organizations are initially looking to deploy AI to reduce operational load and improve journey design.

What is your approach to artificial intelligence in learning and development processes?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



This cautious progress aligns with global research. According to the HBI 2025 Global Leadership Report, 58% of organizations currently use AI to generate data-driven insights; in addition, 53% use AI for performance and progress tracking, and 53% for creating personalized learning pathways. Real-time support for coaching and feedback is also an emerging area, currently at 44%, with expectations that it will increase significantly with 2025 plans. These figures show that AI is beginning to touch the holistic learning experience, rather than being limited to a single function.

At the same time, L&D teams themselves are adapting personally to this transformation. According to the LinkedIn Workplace Learning 2025 Report, 71% of L&D professionals say they are actively experimenting with AI in their daily practices or integrating it into their processes. In other words, while organizational structures may not yet be mature, practitioners are already beginning to demonstrate behavioral change. So what does this picture tell us?

How Does AI Create Value for Learning and Development?

At this point, what is critical for organizations is matching AI technology with the right problem. The data shows that AI creates meaningful value within L&D particularly in the following four areas:

1. Personalized learning pathways

AI can generate tailored roadmaps based on employees' skill profiles, performance signals, and learning history, removing the "choice overload" created by content abundance.

2. Capability analytics and visibility of skill gaps

AI-driven measurement enables rapid modeling of skill needs in response to changing job roles, making L&D strategies more proactive.

3. Real-time coaching and feedback

AI solutions that provide instant development suggestions through text, speech, and behavior analysis are becoming powerful complementary tools, especially in leadership development.

4. Simulations and experiential learning

AI enables the simulation of real work scenarios at scale, allowing critical capabilities to be practiced in a safe environment.

Conclusion: AI Is Not Just a Tool, but Could Become the New Architect of Learning and Development Strategy

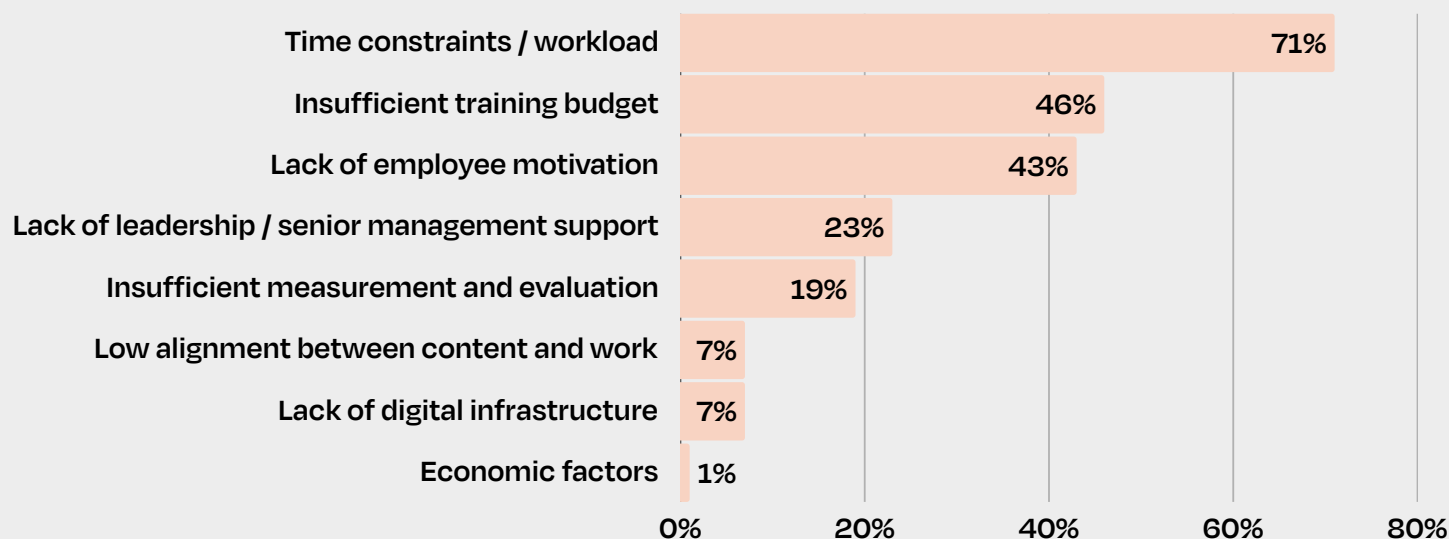
The data tells a simple story. Organizations are not yet using AI at full capacity, but they are clear on the direction: making the learning experience more personal, more contextual, and more effective. For AI to find a meaningful place within learning and development systems, it will not be about adding more technology, but about designing a more integrated learning ecosystem.

The access phase is already behind us; the real issue now is how technology transforms learning. At this point, the critical question becomes increasingly clear: to what extent will AI turn learning into a smarter, more personal, and more behavior-adjacent experience?

Learning and Development Trends Toward 2026: Learning Moves Closer to Real Work

What are the biggest barriers to employee development opportunities?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



The Biggest Barrier to Learning: Time or Priority?

Research findings show that the biggest barrier to employee development is “time constraints and workload,” cited by 71% of respondents. However, this reflects not only operational pressure, but also a deeply rooted perception that learning is still positioned as an activity separate from work. This leads to the critical question: is there truly no time, or is space not created because development is still not seen as a natural part of work?

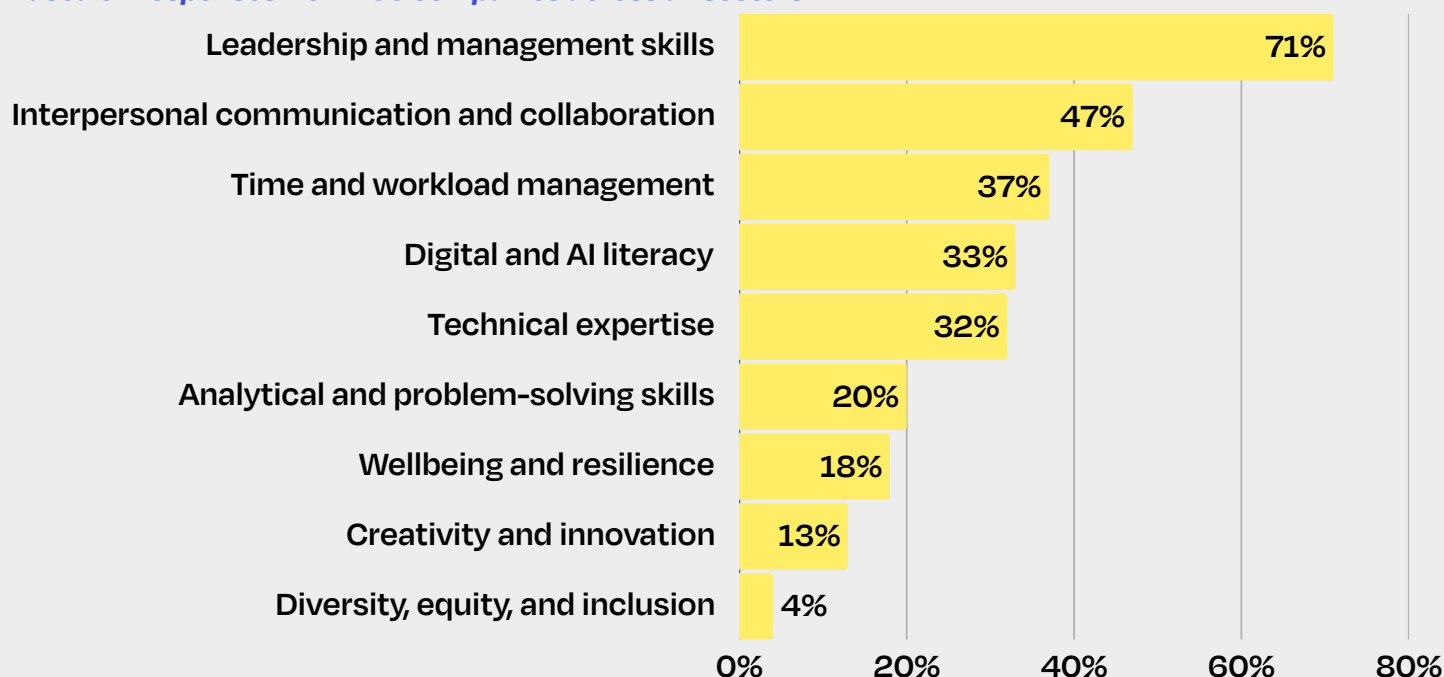
A similar situation applies to leadership development. The HBI 2025 Global Leadership Report identifies lack of time to complete training (49%) as one of the main barriers for leaders. Other challenges cited in the same report: difficulty in evaluation (49%), lack of technology integration (47%), and weak alignment with business strategies (44%) illustrate why learning struggles when it is designed separately from daily workflows. In this context, McKinsey’s 70/20/10 model provides an important frame, reminding us that 70% of learning happens through on-the-job experiences such as role rotations and new projects, 20% through social interactions like feedback, coaching, and mentoring, and only 10% through formal methods. In other words, effective learning inherently takes place at the center of work.

On the other hand, barriers such as insufficient budget (46%) and lack of motivation (43%), while appearing operational at first glance, actually reflect where organizations strategically position development. In some organizations, development is still treated as an activity undertaken “if possible,” whereas in more mature structures it is seen not as a cost, but as a cornerstone of capability-based competitive advantage. As a result, the critical question for many organizations is shifting from “What should we teach?” to “When and how will we learn?”

Ultimately, the issue is not about creating time, but about moving learning closer to the work itself. In organizations that succeed in doing so, what initially appears to be the biggest barrier—time—gradually diminishes and is replaced by a sustainable learning flow.

What are the top 3 critical capability development areas in your organization?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



A Guiding Capability: The Strategic Position of Leadership Development

Seventy-one percent of survey participants identify leadership and management skills as the most critical development area within their organizations. This figure represents not just a preference, but a strong signal of how organizations want to prepare for the future.

Global trends confirm this picture. According to the MindGym Talent Management 2025 Report, strengthening leadership capacity is the top priority for talent managers, with 33% of participants defining leadership development as the most critical organizational development area. In an environment of increasing uncertainty and performance pressure, leaders are expected not only to manage, but to enable learning, transform their teams, and continuously trigger development. For this reason, leadership development is no longer positioned as a “skill set,” but as a transformation muscle that carries organizational culture.

The areas ranked second and third in the chart, interpersonal communication and collaboration (47%) and time and workload management (37%), are directly linked to leadership behaviors. How a leader communicates, prioritizes, and makes decisions shapes team collaboration climates, productivity, and even workplace culture. Similarly, digital and AI literacy (33%) and technical expertise areas (32%), driven by digitalization, gain meaning within ways of working shaped by leaders.



High-potential talent carries great promise when stepping into management for the first time, but leadership is not an automatic transition. It requires a new mindset, a new skill set, and the right support.

Firefly designed a leadership journey together with Lumolead to consciously strengthen this transition and deliver real results.

[Explore Firefly's journey](#)

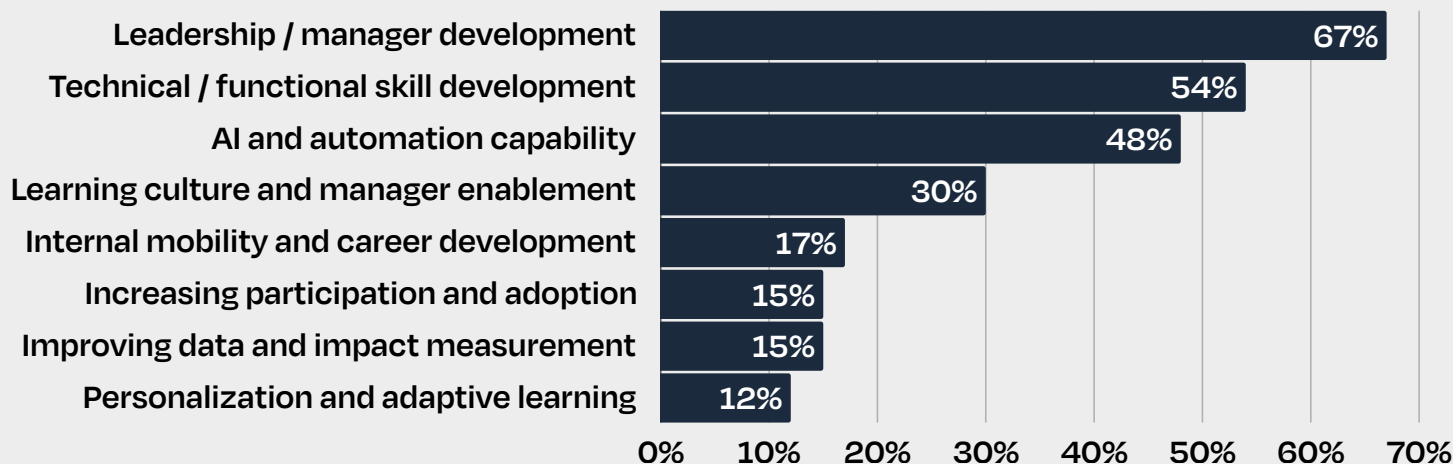
When all these data points are combined, a single message stands out: many of the capability needs organizations identify across different areas are fundamentally rooted in the transformation of leadership capacity. AI literacy, collaboration, problem-solving, innovation, even wellbeing: all of these grow or weaken depending on the environment leaders create. Therefore, this chart should be read not merely as a priority list, but as a strong signal of the leadership model organizations need for the future. And this model is no longer about “managing,” but about leaders who accelerate learning, strengthen trust, and enable change. For this reason, leadership development moves far beyond being a “capability development” area and becomes the backbone of organizational learning and transformation.

Leadership Development: A Central Priority in Organizational Transformation

This also explains why leadership and manager development appears as the number one L&D priority for the next 12 months at 67% in the following chart. Leadership is not only a critical capability area, but the core mechanism that enables all other development priorities on the list, from technical skills to AI literacy, to be realized. The effectiveness of strategic areas such as technical or functional skill development (54%) and AI and automation capability (48%) largely depends on how managers bring these capabilities into their teams' agendas. The high visibility of learning culture and manager enablement needs (30%) indicates that organizations recognize the need to strengthen leadership capability first in order to scale learning behaviors. In other words, leadership development is no longer just a training program; it is an investment that determines organizational resilience, agility, and competitive position in the talent market.

What are your top 3 priorities in Learning & Development for the next 12 months?

Based on responses from 136 companies across all sectors



At the same time, a significant gap stands out. Today, 32% of companies do not have a defined leadership development program. This gap makes visible both the transformation needs of current leaders and the lack of systems to develop future leaders. As a result, leadership development becomes not just a topic placed high on priority lists, but a foundational structure that sustains organizations' long-term talent strategies.

The conclusion is clear. No matter how much organizations invest in AI or how many technical skills they develop, the real speed of transformation is still determined by leadership capacity. Therefore, placing leadership development at the center of L&D's future agenda is not a trend, but a natural outcome of organizations' survival strategies.

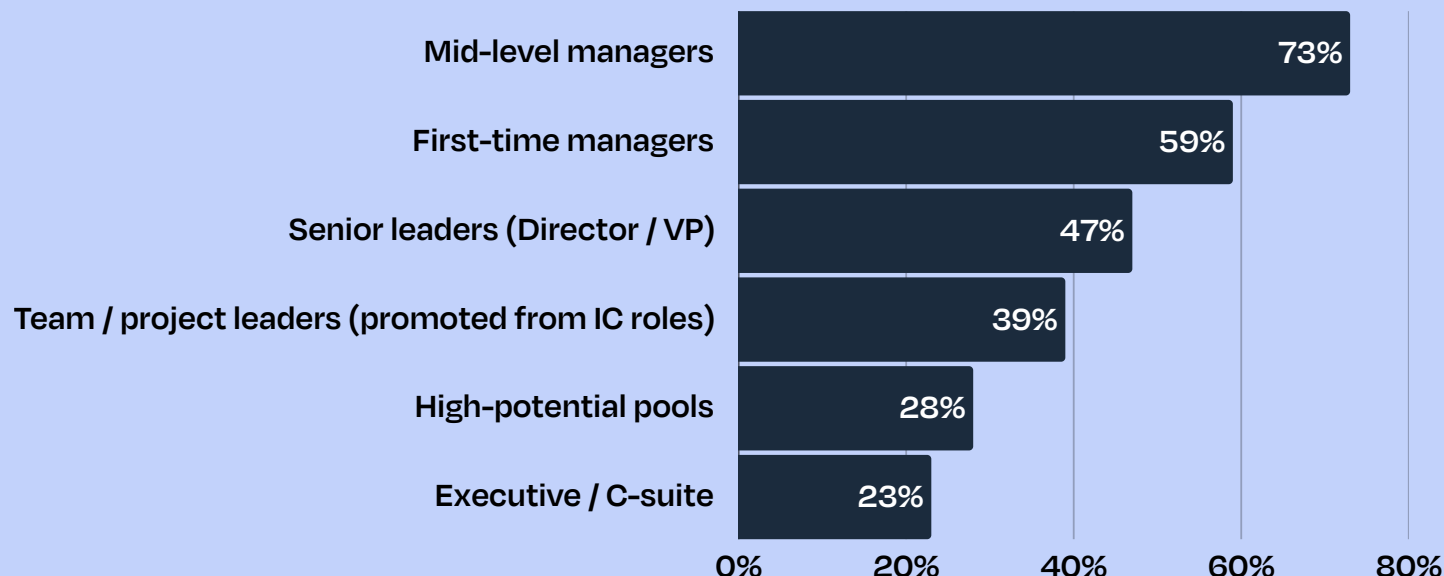
32%

32% percent of companies do not have a leadership development program.

The Layered Map of Leadership Development: Strong Intent, Selective Execution

For which levels is leadership development offered?

Based on responses from 93 companies with leadership development programs



Who Is Leadership Development Designed For?

Survey data shows that leadership development is present on organizational agendas, but that this agenda varies across different levels. Seventy-three percent of organizations offer programs for mid-level managers, while 59% provide programs for first-time managers. These two groups form the core focus of leadership development.

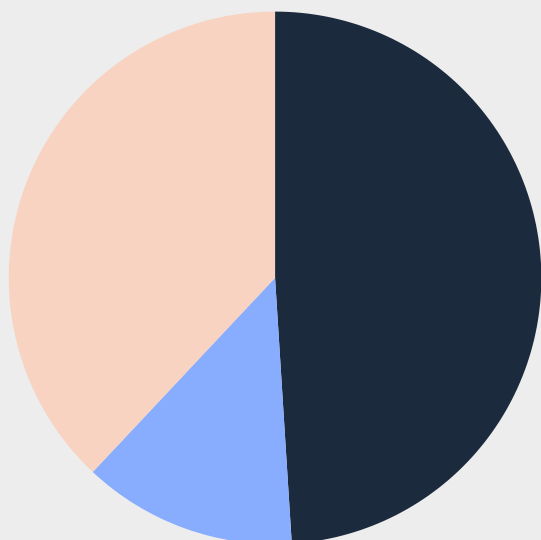
This distribution suggests that leadership development carries not only the responsibility of managing the present, but also of preparing for the future. Investment in first-time managers reflects a strategic perspective of developing leaders “before they become leaders.”

However, another notable point stands out. Only 23% of organizations implement development programs for senior leaders. This finding implies that C-level leaders are often excluded from the development architecture or that their needs are addressed through different tools. Yet leadership development research emphasizes that evolving leadership expectations also create significant development needs at the top management level. This brings the question “to what extent does leadership development include the top?” back into focus.

How Is Development Implemented?

When model preferences are examined, 49% of organizations are seen to run leadership development primarily through external providers. Only 13% rely entirely on internal content or in-house academies. The remaining 38% represent a hybrid model that balances sustainability with the generation of organization-specific insight.

This distribution shows that organizations still have development areas when it comes to building their own leadership capability. While external resources may offer a functional solution for many organizations, developing organization-specific leadership models and content creates deeper cultural alignment in the long term.



How do you deliver your leadership development programs?

Based on responses from 93 companies with leadership development programs

- Mostly external / outsourced (consultants, training providers, universities, etc.)
49%
- Hybrid model (external + internal)
38%
- Mostly internal content / in-house academy
13%

Why Is Leadership So Critical?

The prominence of leadership development is not coincidental. Research shows that leadership capacity directly shapes not only team productivity, but also collaboration environments, cultural alignment, employee engagement, change management, and organizational learning. For this reason, leadership development is no longer positioned as a "training topic," but as a strategic building block that determines an organization's speed of transformation and resilience.

When all these data points are brought together, the picture becomes clear. Leadership development is not merely a part of organizational learning; it is the backbone that carries it.

Leadership is no longer a luxury, but a priority.

According to research conducted by Gallup, for 55% of CEOs the top priority is developing next-generation leaders. However, this leadership gap cannot be closed through traditional training alone.

For L&D teams, the task is no longer just to plan training, but to design transformation.

Design Transformation with Lumolead

Explore Our Leadership Development Trend Report





Your Long-Term Leadership Partner for Leadership Development

By bringing everything you need for leadership development under one roof, we reduce your organization's workload while increasing the impact of your programs and making them measurable.



Platform-Based Discovery & Learning

Perfect for individual leaders or small groups looking to start immediately.

Group-Based Growth Journey

Ideal for scaling leadership across the organization, aligned with your culture.

Goal-Oriented Coaching

Designed for leaders or teams with a specific development focus

Online, Self-Paced
Length: Flexible

What's Included

- Strengths Discovery Tool
- Optional 360 Feedback
- Personalized Micro-learnings
- Commitment Tracking
- Always-on AI Coach
- Company Dashboard

Details
See our 6 Pillars Model, the other details and the optional add-ons we offer.

[Explore Our Platform](#)

Online / Hybrid / Onsite
Length: 3-12 Months

Everything in QuickStart +

- Organizational Discovery
- Journey Customization
- Live Workshops
- Gamification
- Peer Circles
- Post-program Support

Optional Add On's
See program templates for different leadership levels and optional add-ons

[Explore Growth Journeys](#)

Online / Hybrid / Onsite
Length: 8-16 Weeks

1:1 or Team Coaching Journeys:

- Personalized Learnings
- Always-on AI Coach
- Commitment Tracking
- Smart Nudges & Reminders
- Company Dashboard

Optional Add On's
See 1:1 and team coaching templates for details and the optional add-ons

[Explore Coaching Journeys](#)



For detailed information about the product, you can visit our [website](#) or contact us via our LinkedIn account and at hello@lumolead.com

