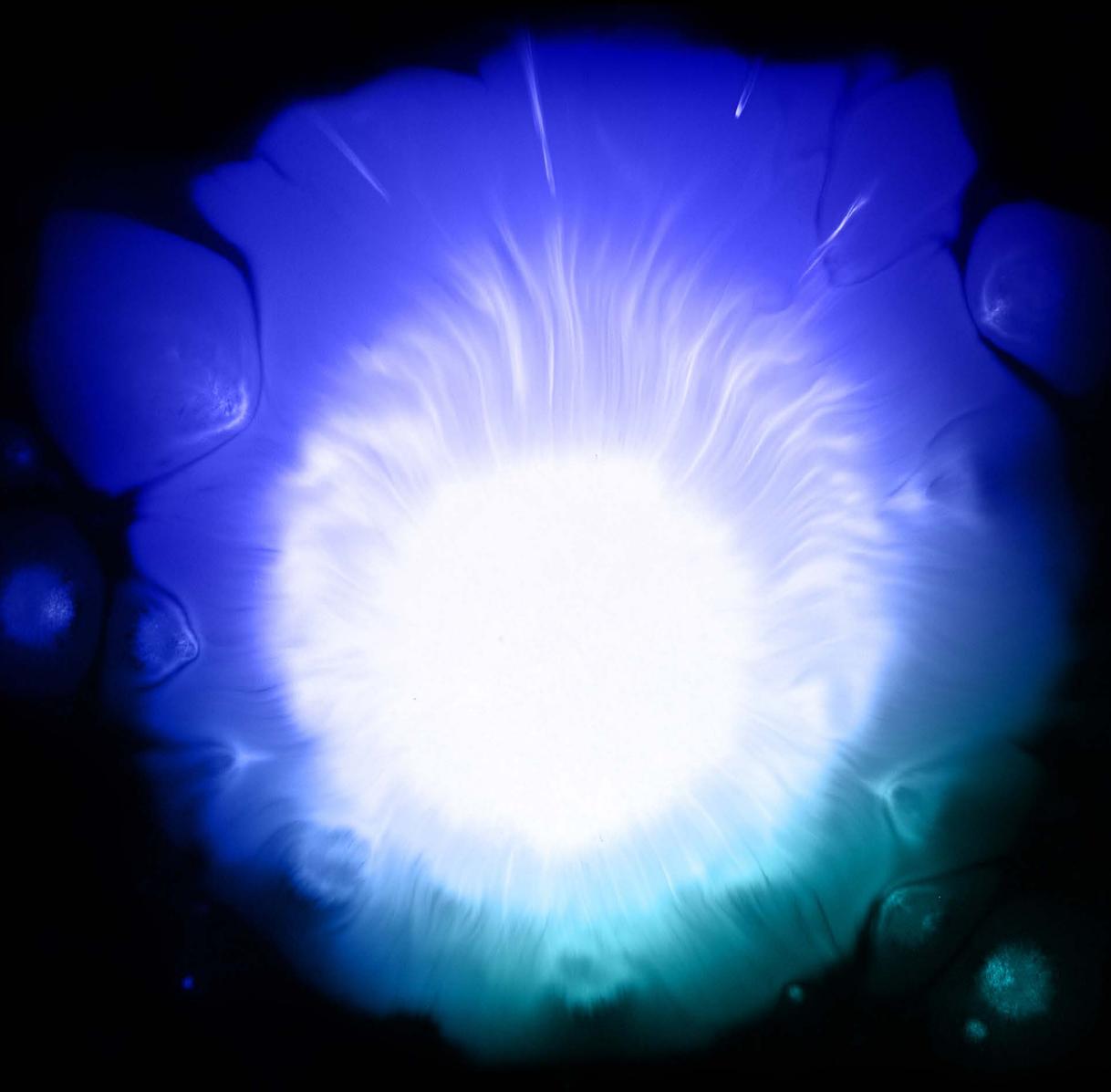


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Is your workforce future-ready?
How Lifelong Learning can help
build the skills and capabilities
needed to thrive tomorrow



The world of work is undergoing seismic shifts, moving away from traditional workplace structures and into new territory.

Constant advances in technology, as well as new political, social, environmental, and economic challenges, have disrupted traditional work models. COVID-19 has forced employers and governments to explore new work structures to protect workers and citizens from environments where they might be at risk of contracting the virus. For many organizations, these factors have ushered in a period of collective uncertainty about what the future holds—for workers, their work, and the physical workplace.

Many leading organizations, however, are realizing that more than half of their workers will need to augment their skills and capabilities to position the organization for long-term success.¹ Most leaders agree their workforce doesn't have all the skills that will be required in the future—that the workers aren't future-ready—and that their learning ecosystem is not currently designed to solve this problem. Traditional academic institutions and educators are not necessarily mandated to prepare people to be workers of the future.



Business leaders in every industry should be asking the following questions:

1. How can we best support our workforce to operate in this next normal?
2. What skills and capabilities do we need our people to learn so they are future-ready?
3. What focused learning initiatives should we prioritize and invest in?
4. What steps can we take now to reskill and prepare our workforce for the future?

For many organizations, answering these questions will be hard, but not impossible.

Work, workers, and the workplace: A shifting mindset

While there is no single solution to these challenges, organizations need to give their teams access to the tools they need to help reinvent themselves, empowering them to think differently, act differently, and work differently. To nurture this new mindset in their workforce, an organization must be willing to approach learning differently.

Most leaders agree that learning is vital in driving future success, and yet many are still uncertain about how this key component for growth can be integrated into their organization. When surveyed for Deloitte's *2020 Global Human Capital Trends* report, 74 percent of business and human resource leaders said they believe reskilling is important for their success, but only 10 percent believe they are equipped to implement programming to meet the need.²

To embrace change and capitalize on constant learning for employees, organizations need to build resilience among their workers. A new culture must be nurtured, one in which workers welcome the opportunities to continuously refresh their skills and capabilities so they can thrive in a dynamic, fast-paced world. To spark this mindset shift in their employees, organizations need to adopt a fresh approach: Lifelong Learning.

What is Lifelong Learning?

We define Lifelong Learning as an approach to learning in which resources, expectations, and culture encourage employees to learn continuously throughout their tenure with the organization.³ It requires leaders to adopt a mindset and approach that supports this objective, transforming teaching techniques and curricula within their organizations.

To accelerate this approach, it's critical for leaders to integrate learning into the flow of work. By embedding opportunities for learning into the work itself, organizations can move away from event-based learning programs that take employees

away from their work. Learning in the flow of work integrates lessons into activities that are part of employees' daily responsibilities using tools with which they are already familiar, making it a highly effective learning environment. Lifelong learning empowers workers to keep pace with the evolving work environment by continually reskilling themselves and it allows leaders to rapidly develop their employees to achieve organizational objectives.⁴ Through the continuous learning model, businesses can pivot away from sequential learning programs (traditional training culture) toward a model of learning as an ongoing process.

As organizations strive to reimagine a different approach to learning, they must also consider designing these opportunities to increase engagement with each individual, ultimately driving value for both the employee and the organization.

Learning in the flow of work should be:



Experiential

Learning should incorporate each participant's past experiences and opportunities to link with real work experiences. Stories connecting to human emotion and relevant experience is key to committing learning to memory.



Integrated

Learning should solve actual work-related problems. Integrating learning into work means it is more efficient, immediately applicable, and memorable.



Blended

Learning should bring together the best of digital and instructor-led opportunities to engage a wider variety of learners and appeal to more learning styles. Blending digital learning experiences with facilitated, hands-on sessions will lead to increased scalability and accessibility.



Lifelong

Learning should address both immediate functional skills and longer-term capability development. Learning that is perceived to contribute to the overall personal and professional growth of the individual is valued more deeply and will result in increased engagement.

How to get started

Good news: leaders can start today to help their organizations prioritize workforce resilience through Lifelong Learning.

The following section highlights four areas of opportunity for productive change. Through these steps, leaders can reimagine how work will be done in the future, rethink the partnership between the business and the learning function, tactically embed learning in the flow of work, and foster a sustainable culture of learning.



Step 1

Reimagine how work will be done in the future

Organizations recognize that the next normal will require their workforce to learn differently. However, redesigning an existing learning curriculum to embody a generic list of must-have future skills will not prepare workers to adapt to a range of impending and unexpected changes. Instead, leaders should first invest in reimagining how work

will be done in the future. Through that understanding, they can prioritize short-term strategic reskilling initiatives that meet the immediate needs of the workforce while simultaneously embedding enduring capabilities that will serve workers and organizations—regardless of task, role, or function—in the long term.

To identify the skills and capabilities that will be required in the future, leaders can undertake the following activities:

Identify business-specific strategic objectives

Ask leading questions of each business unit to recognize what work will look like in the next three to five years. What is each business unit trying to achieve? What skills and capabilities are required to achieve these objectives?

Recognize existing skills and capabilities

Develop an inventory of current skills and capabilities across different roles and job levels in the company.

Assess existing skills and capabilities gaps

Identify the necessary worker-specific reskilling: compare the current skills and capability inventory with the skills and capabilities required to meet the organization's future objectives.

Seal existing skills and capabilities gaps

Determine the actions required to close these gaps, including:

- Building: reskill the workforce
- Buying: recruit skilled workers
- Borrowing: engage contingent workers to meet short-term needs

Step 2

Rethink the partnership between the business and the learning function

In most organizations, the learning function is the primary owner and provider of learning—it establishes the curriculum in addition to designing and delivering content and courses. However, if the company truly aspires to transform

learning into an impactful, responsive, and adaptive experience that moves with the changing needs of the business and its surrounding ecosystem, this relationship needs to be a joint partnership.

To create this partnership, business leaders should consider the following actions:

Dissolve silos

Deconstruct traditional practices where the learning function facilitates the development and delivery of content without the collaborative perspective of key stakeholders, including the learners themselves. Seek direct input from business units and workers about their learning preferences and the flow of their day-to-day work in order to develop user-driven learning environments.

Encourage the sharing of relevant data

Promote a trusting two-way relationship where both the business and learning functions can access one another's qualitative and quantitative data. This will allow holistic inputs from both functions regarding worker learning needs and potential opportunities.

Appoint the learning function to advise

Transfer the role of content ownership to the business units while encouraging those in the learning function to own the role of subject matter experts on learning best practices.

By enabling the learning function to support the business with expertise in learning, best practices, and instructional design, relevant content can be developed and tied directly to the business's desired outcomes. In conjunction, the business functions will be able to identify experiential learning opportunities that are aligned with day-to-day business problems, respond rapidly to learning gaps, and stay agile enough to pilot new learning approaches.

Step 3

Tactically embed learning into the flow of work

When it comes to business leaders building workforce resilience and instilling in their employees a mindset of ongoing learning, there is no better time to start than right now. In doing so, leaders themselves can practice the very essence of continuous learning. Human Capital Research and Sensing, Deloitte's research and advisory

services unit that focuses on corporate learning, uses a “four Es” model—**e**nvironment, **e**xposure, **e**xperience, and **e**ducation—with clients to provide a tangible starting point for leaders to select the appropriate contexts to embed delivery methods for continuous learning.⁵

Here are some ways business leaders can immediately start embedding learning into the flow of work:

Invest in learning

Invest time, resources, and effort into appropriate tools and continuous learning approaches for their workplace. These can include peer feedback, on-the-job assignments, job shadowing, workshops, and performance tools that make sense for the learning and strategic goals identified by the organization.⁵

Align with the learning function

Engage in transparent communication to build trusting relationships between the learning and HR functions, establishing parallel paths among organizational and learning strategies.⁶

Promote data-guided adaptation

Provide workers with their performance data and metrics to equip them to make changes to their personal learning journey.

Reimagine learning metrics

Track metrics that enable worker performance and effectiveness, such as real-time worker performance data (e.g., sales metrics, operational metrics, external feedback from customers, worker safety, and proficiency metrics), to replace metrics that focus on quantitatively tracking the delivery of training content (e.g., number of courses delivered, number of learning hours, evaluation scores, learner satisfaction).⁷ Moreover, align learning metrics to overall organizational goals, such as enhancing customer satisfaction, increasing sales, and optimizing operations.

Step 4

Foster a sustainable culture of learning

Finally, a series of enablers are required to support the acceptance of a new approach to learning and the culture shift it will require. The most critical enabler is for leaders across the organization to adopt a new mindset and ethos toward

Lifelong Learning. By embedding learning into the full talent life cycle—from acquisition to succession—leaders can create an environment where employees feel supported and trusted to integrate learning into their daily work activities.

Leaders can use several people-driven approaches to weave learning into the flow of work as part of the organizational culture:

Transform how the organization talks about learning

Adopt common terminology for the business and learning functions that references and communicates the essence of continuous learning. This common vocabulary will support the development of a like mindset toward learning in the flow of work.⁵ For example, shifting vocabulary away from *delivering* learning and toward *enabling* worker development should change how the workforce thinks about learning programs.

Recognize learning within the organization

Stay alert to opportunities for workers to benefit from stretch assignments and informal apprenticeship programs that let them learn through doing.

Celebrate learning

Hold continuous learning in high regard so employees recognize the value of incorporating it in their everyday activities. A critical enabler here is for leaders across the organization to adopt the role of champions, empowering employees to embrace structured experimentation and challenge conventional learning and development mindsets.

Preparing your people to thrive tomorrow

The COVID-19 pandemic has monumentally redefined society's attitude toward traditional workforce structures. Advances in technology will power more changes to how we all work, as remote employees seek to connect and work more efficiently with their teams and organizations. Over the next decade, we can expect more shifts in how employees work.

Many organizations are now at a crossroads. They can either start creating strategies that will build a robust, agile, future-ready workforce, or risk being left behind by the evolving world of work. Lifelong Learning not only ensures each employee is fully prepared to function in a future defined by uncertainty, but it also helps to guarantee the organization thrives alongside them.



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Endnotes

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³ *An Introduction to Continuous Learning*, D. Johnson, Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Development LLC, 2019

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