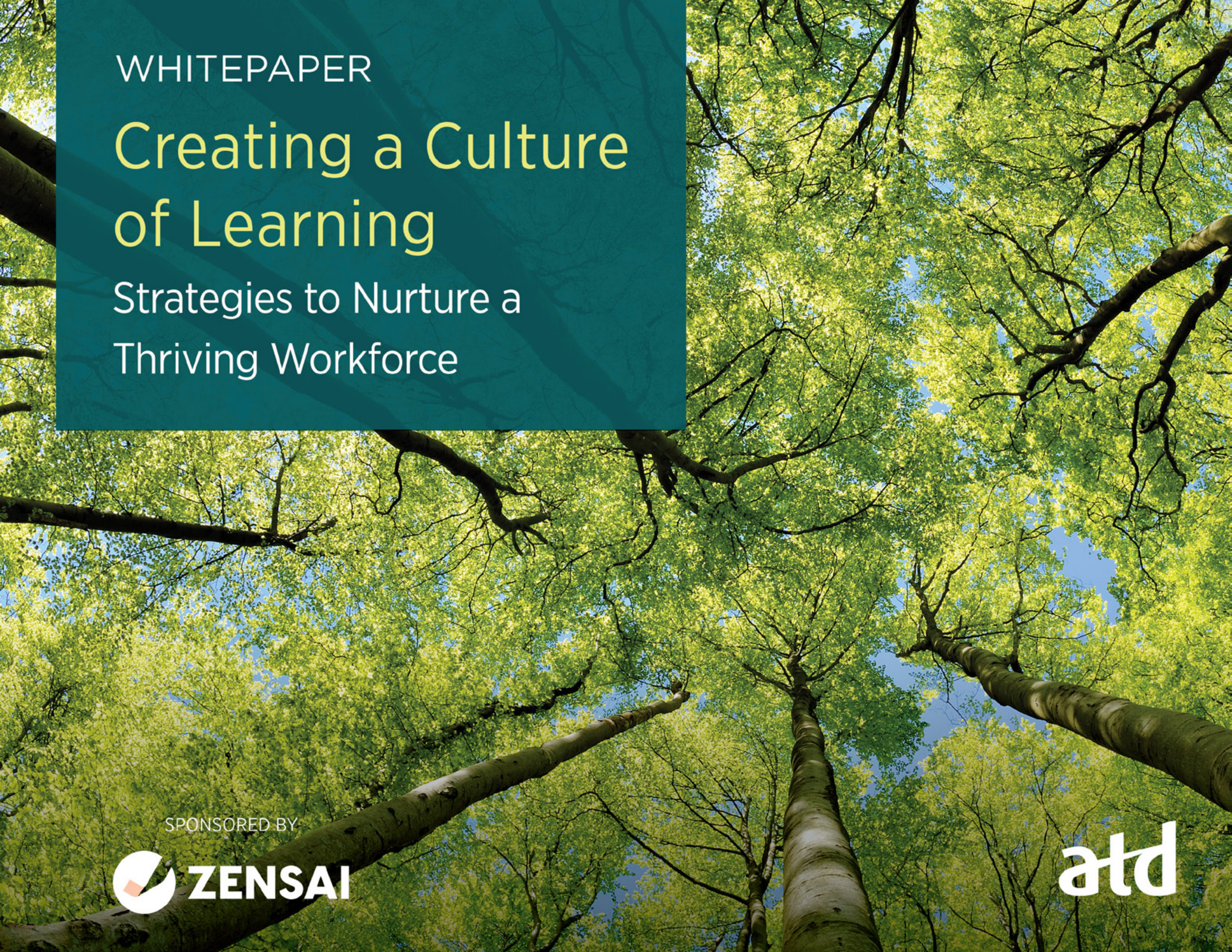

WHITEPAPER
Creating a Culture of Learning
Strategies to Nurture a Thriving Workforce
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About ATD Research

What We Do

ATD Research tracks trends, informs decisions, and connects research to performance for talent development professionals. Our research reports offer an empirical foundation for today's data-driven decision makers. ATD cares about your success, and our specialized research devoted to talent development proves it.

2026 ATD Research Topics

- Beyond the Basics: How Organizations Are Personalizing and Enhancing E-Learning
- Communicating the Value of TD: Insights From TD Professionals and the C-Suite
- Creating a Culture of Learning: Insights and Strategies for TD Professionals
- Leadership Development at All Levels
- State of the Industry Report
- Employer-Sponsored Professional Development
- Skills Gap in the Age of AI
- From Insights to Impact
- Sales Enablement
- An AI Review



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A Note From the Sponsor



A strong culture of learning is becoming one of the clearest signals of organizational resilience. As roles evolve and skills shift faster than ever, learning is no longer about keeping up. It's about helping people perform better, grow with confidence, and stay connected to the work they do every day.

This research highlights both progress and pressure. Many organizations are investing in learning, yet 72 percent report they lack the time or resources to fully support a learning culture. At the same time, demand for development continues to rise. Employees want to grow, and they expect learning to feel relevant to their roles and goals.

Organizations that align learning to real goals, embed it into everyday work, and use performance conversations as moments for growth see stronger engagement and better results. Learning stops feeling like an extra task and starts driving progress that people and the businesses can see.

You can see this in practice. One organization connects learning goals to weekly check-ins, so managers reinforce development in real performance conversations. Another gives employees dedicated learning time tied to role-based skills, not generic content libraries. In both cases, learning becomes more visible, more practical, and easier to sustain.

This report gives you a clear path from intent to action. If you want learning to support performance, engagement, and retention, the message is simple. Design learning around people, connect it to goals, and use AI to turn development into measurable progress.

About Zensai

Zensai brings learning, performance, and engagement into one platform, built directly inside Microsoft 365, Teams, Outlook, SharePoint, and Copilot.

Most organizations don't struggle with learning. They struggle with disconnected systems: Learning lives in one system, goals in another, performance conversations somewhere else, and no one can clearly see how growth translates into results. Zensai fixes that by connecting learning directly to goals and performance inside the tools people already use.

As AI reshapes work, learning can't be an extra task. It must be embedded in the flow of work. Zensai uses AI to help organizations set meaningful goals, recommend relevant learning, and link development to performance outcomes as work happens. Learning becomes continuous, relevant, and tied to outcomes. That's how you build a culture of learning that lasts.

Humans are your bottom line. Zensai helps you prove it. To learn more about Zensai, visit www.zensai.com.

Executive Summary

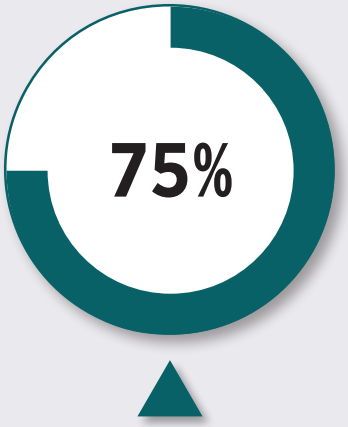
In *Creating a Culture of Learning: Strategies to Nurture a Thriving Workforce*, 350 talent development professionals answered questions about how they promote a culture of learning and what challenges they face in doing so. Additionally, 1,035 working Americans (learners) answered questions about the learning culture at their organizations.

Some key findings from this study include:

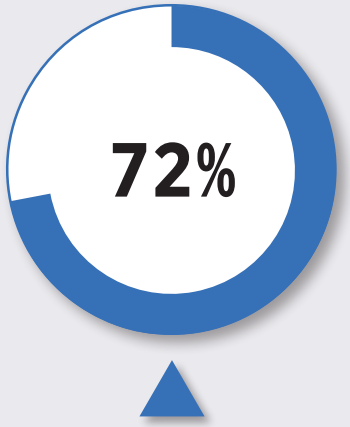
- **Organizations use a variety of initiatives to support a culture of learning.** Some of them include considering learning or growth activities in performance reviews, providing employees with individual development plans, and recognizing and rewarding employees for engaging in learning activities.
- **Nearly two-thirds of organizations provide employees with learning hours or dedicated learning time.** Organizations provide a median of 40 learning hours per year.
- **Seventy-two percent of organizations lack resources such as staff and time to support a culture of learning.** However, demand for learning opportunities remains high.



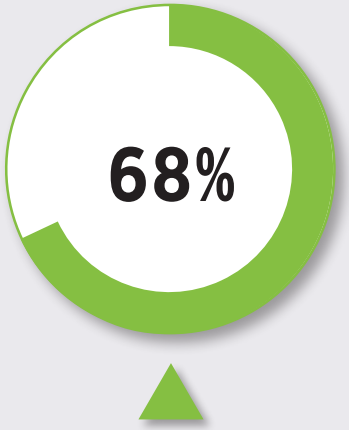
By the Numbers



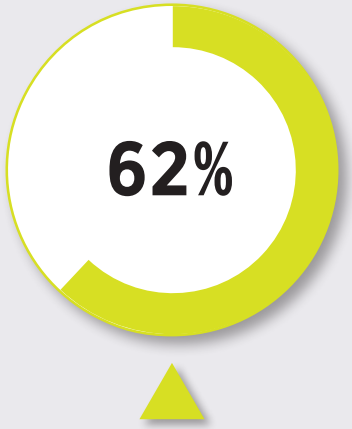
of organizations reward or recognize employees for engaging in learning activites.



of organizations lack the resources to support a learning culture.



of organizations use mentorship programs for on-the-job learning.



of organizations provide employees with learning hours.



of organizations use lunch & learns for informal learning.

Whitepaper

For many businesses, remaining competitive requires having the ability to effectively manage change and quickly implement new strategies by adapting to evolving market trends and technologies. At the same time, employees seek purpose in their work and opportunities for career growth. Companies that foster a culture of learning are best positioned to stay agile and innovative while achieving strong employee engagement and retention.[1]

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, a learning culture is "an environment that demonstrates and encourages learning at both the individual and organizational levels, where sharing and gaining knowledge is prioritized, valued, and rewarded. A learning culture happens when learning becomes part of the ecosystem of the organization."[2]

This study delivers benchmarking data on how TD professionals develop a culture of learning and includes resources and guidance on best practices.



Action Plan

This report explores how TD professionals develop a culture of learning and the challenges they face in doing so. It also investigates the experiences and preferences of learners across a variety of organizations and industries. To cultivate a culture of learning at your organization, ATD Research recommends the following steps:

- **Involve employees in the process.** Provide ways for employees to give input on learning programs. Support self-directed learning, peer mentoring, and collaborative learning environments.
- **Embed learning across the organization.** Encourage leaders to promote a commitment to lifelong learning. Emphasize psychological safety so employees are comfortable taking risks and learning from their mistakes.
- **Deliver tangible outcomes.** Identify skills gaps and develop targeted learning initiatives to close them. Align learning programs with business goals and focus on increasing productivity, innovation, and retention.

To learn more, visit td.org/templates-and-tools/Talent-Development-Learning-Culture-Checklist.



Acknowledgments

ATD gratefully acknowledges the contributions of time and professional insights from the following subject matter experts:

- **Mike Miller,** Senior Director of Learning and Organizational Development, onsemi
- **Steve Sorenson,** Senior Director of Learning and Culture, Johnsonville



Survey Overview

Target Survey Population

The target populations for this research were talent development professionals and working Americans across a variety of industries. A total of 350 talent development professionals and 1,035 working Americans completed the surveys.

Survey Instrument

Two surveys were created for this study. The survey targeted at TD professionals was composed of 13 questions including those related to the demographics of respondents. The survey targeted at working Americans was composed of eight questions including those related to the demographics of respondents.

Procedure

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey targeted at talent development professionals in September 2025. The survey closed in October 2025. ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey targeted at working Americans in October 2025. The survey closed the same month.



Demographics of TD Professionals

Employee Status	
Employed full time	97%
Employed part time	3%

Organizational Size	
Small *(1–99 employees)*	11%
Medium *(100–2,499 employees)*	59%
Large *(2,500–9,999 employees)*	16%
Extra large *(10,000 or more employees)*	14%

Industry	
Accomodation and food service	3%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	<1%
Construction	9%
Educational services	6%
Finance and insurance	8%
Healthcare and social assistance	21%
Information	3%
Management of companies and enterprises	3%
Manufacturing	14%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	1%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	5%
Public administration	6%
Real estate and rental and leasing	1%
Retail trade	4%
Transportation and warehousing	1%
Utilities	2%
Wholesale trade	1%
Other services	11%

Region	
Africa or Middle East	<1%
Asia-Pacific	1%
Canada	<1%
Europe, UK, or Ireland	2%
Latin America or South America	<1%
Mexico	<1%
United States	94%
Other	<1%

Span of Control	
Executive or director	44%
People or project manager	44%
Individual contributor	12%
Other	<1%

Demographics of Working Americans

Employee Status	
Employed full time	98%
Employed part time	2%

Organizational Size	
Small *(1–99 employees)*	29%
Medium *(100–2,499 employees)*	48%
Large *(2,500–9,999 employees)*	14%
Extra large *(10,000 or more employees)*	9%

Industry	
Accomodation and food service	5%
Administrative, support, waste management, and remediation services	1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	<1%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1%
Construction	6%
Educational services	9%
Finance and insurance	8%
Healthcare and social assistance	13%
Information	12%
Management of companies and enterprises	1%
Manufacturing	7%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	<1%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	6%
Public administration	2%
Real estate and rental and leasing	1%
Retail trade	7%
Transportation and warehousing	4%
Utilities	1%
Wholesale trade	1%
Other services	15%

Region	
Africa or Middle East	<1%
Asia-Pacific	<1%
Canada	<1%
Europe, UK, or Ireland	1%
Latin America or South America	<1%
Mexico	<1%
United States	98%

Span of Control	
Executive or director	27%
People or project manager	38%
Individual contributor	25%
Other	10%

ATD Resources

ATD has many free and paid resources about establishing a culture of learning at your organization. Whether you have five minutes or five weeks, we have content that will fit your schedule.

The ATDYou Learning Library includes 80 self-paced courses with content for a variety of talent development roles.*

- The Fostering a Learning Organization course explores why establishing a learning culture is crucial to organizational success and how TD professionals can foster a learning culture. Visit td.org/education-courses/fostering-a-learning-organization.

ATD Accidental Trainer is a podcast that features interviews with industry experts who share stories and tips about how to grow a training career.

- "Learning as a Lifestyle With Melissa Loble" provides advice on how to establish a culture of continuous development, overcome common barriers to learning, and create learning programs for diverse audiences. Visit td.org/content/accidental-trainer/learning-as-a-lifestyle-with-melissa-loble.

The ATD Blog is filled with posts on a variety of topics.

- "Transforming Teams: 3 Strategies for Cultivating a Dynamic Learning Culture" shares ideas for promoting collaborative learning and how to shift organizational culture from focusing on performance to focusing on learning. Visit td.org/content/atd-blog/transforming-teams-3-strategies-for-cultivating-a-dynamic-learning-culture.

Articles published by ATD cover industry best practices, emerging technologies, and trends.

- "A Learning Culture Under Construction" explores best practices for establishing a learning culture. Visit td.org/content/talent-development-leader/a-learning-culture-under-construction.

**Not included in the price of ATD membership*

Not a member of ATD? Visit TD.org to join and gain access to ATD's resources, articles, whitepapers, webinars, and more.

Notes

1 S. Trovas, “Cultivate a Learning Culture Within Your Organization,” Center for Creative Leadership, September 10, 2025, ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/cultivate-and-sustain-a-learning-culture-within-your-organization.

2 Trovas, “Cultivate a Learning Culture Within Your Organization.”



About the Author and Contributors

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most-trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries. Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace.

The resources we provide to help talent development professionals increase their impact and effectiveness include our research. ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.



Rocki Basel, PhD, is the director of ATD research services and served as an editor for this report.



Tessa Guiv is a researcher for ATD and was the author of this report.



Paula Ketter is senior editor of publications and communications for ATD and served as an editor for this report.



Melissa Jones is the manager of ATD Press and served as an editor for this report.



Shirley E.M. Raybuck is a senior graphic designer for ATD and served as the designer for this report.

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Learn more at **TD.org**.

More From ATD Research



Communicating the Value

CEOs view talent development (TD) not just as an operational expense, but as a strategic investment in future success. In *Communicating the Value of TD,* 356 talent development professionals answered questions about the methods and metrics they use to communicate the value of TD to senior leaders and executives. Additionally, 103 C-suite executives (excluding HR and TD executives) answered questions about what metrics they prefer TD professionals to use to measure performance. For more information, visit td.org/valueoftd.



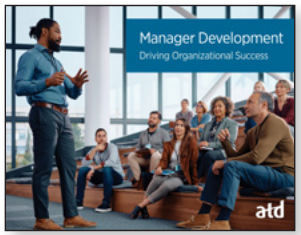
Change Management

Change management aims to prepare people and organizations to adapt to the new normal. The talent development function should play a crucial role in the process by ensuring that employees have the skills they need to thrive. *Change Management: TD's Role in Driving Organizational Transformation* draws on a sample of 311 talent development professionals across a variety of industries to deliver benchmarking data and highlight best practices. For more information, visit td.org/changemanagementreport.



Beyond the Basics

This report draws on a sample of 254 TD professionals who use e-learning across a variety of industries. They answered questions about the content areas where e-learning is most often used, how organizations personalize e-learning to address user needs, and how organizations use AI to develop e-learning assets. For more information, visit td.org/beyondthebasics.



Manager Development

Managers serve a crucial role in their organizations, acting as a bridge between senior leaders and employees. But to perform at the highest level, managers need training that equips them with the skills to succeed and to make sure their employees succeed. *Manager Development* draws on a sample of 409 talent development professionals across a variety of industries to deliver benchmarking data and highlight best practices. For more information, visit td.org/managerdevelopmentreport.

Note: All ATD research reports can be purchased by visiting td.org/Store.

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- Link to free sponsor offering on ATD
- Research webpage
- Webinar citation and participation
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- ATD will send out a press release that mentions you as the sponsor.

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Partnership

Partner with ATD Research to study the organizational performance topic of your interest. The partner advantage:

- Your theories synchronize with our objective research practices.
- Your interests are represented throughout the research cycle.
- Your specific research objectives are clearly defined and met.
- Our analytic efforts support your business interests and concerns.
- Our results improve your productivity, efficiency, and/or bottom line.

Partnership entitles you to the same promotional benefits as sponsorship. Also, as a partner, you guide and we execute the research plan to do the following:

- Define the topic and objective.
- Identify data sources.
- Deliver collection instrument(s).
- Conduct interviews.
- Analyze data.
- Author report(s).
- Disseminate findings.
- Conduct webinars.