



The Evolution of Learning and Development

Executive summary

L&D needs Person-to-Person Learning. We'll explain what it is and how it'll change your thinking on employee Learning and Development.

Learning and Development is undergoing a shift. The shelf-life of employee skills is shortening, and our methods to upskill them today aren't fully meeting our needs. This gap is leading to new ways of thinking about L&D and, with it, new tactics and strategies.

What are these new tactics and strategies? In short, it's person-to-person learning. The thinking goes that instead of only leveraging online courses, full-day seminars, and performance appraisals, we need ongoing, personalized growth through meaningful conversations with real people. What our L&D strategies need is more mentorship, peer coaching, and collaborative discussions.

About Together

Together empowers organizations to accelerate their employee Learning and Development through mentorship and peer learning. We've built a platform that makes it easy to match every employee with a relevant mentor or peer. Almost every employee wants to learn from a mentor, but finding one is hard. With Together, it's easy and scalable.

HR and L&D teams can leverage Together's platform to take their employee development strategies to the next level. There will always be a place for independent courses to build skills. But person-to-person learning empowers your employees to grow through their relationships with coworkers. It's the new way forward for professional development.

Some of our customers include



Want to see how we can help
you bring your Person-to-Person
Learning strategy to life?

[Book Demo](#)

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Looking back to inform the future:

Fast-forwarding through the history of employee training

When looking at Learning and Development, we need to go way back. We need to talk to Richard J. Torraco, a professor at The University of Nebraska. His research focuses on workforce and human resource development.

In 2016 he published "[Early History of the Fields of Practice of Training and Development and Organization Development](#)." In it, he clearly outlined the trajectory that led to what we now know as Learning and Development:

"An examination of the history of education from the beginning shows a continuum of human progress from survival-driven learning; to education rooted in antiquity, the classics, and religious beliefs; to the influences of war and military strategy on scientific and technical education; to the job skills training and scientific management spawned by the industrial revolution; to the post-World War II era leadership development programs and the training of teams; and, finally, to the development of individuals, organizations, and communities for a variety of work-related purposes."



World War 2 kick-started what we now know as employee development

The US economy underwent dramatic changes during and after World War 2. Industries had to transform to meet the production demands of war. Millions of workers needed specialized skills. Even after the war, the training programs designed to close these skill gaps maintained their momentum.

During this era, organizations sprang up to train workers. As millions of workers started to get on-the-job training, methods and models were documented; best practices were established.

The internet led to the Learning Management System, which worked, but wasn't perfect

Flash forward to the advent of the internet, and we see many of L&D's best practices moving into the digital world. Starting in universities but then moving to the workplace, Learning Management Systems became where learning happened.

The Learning Management System made it easy to launch and track employee training. It was effective — but not perfect. Although it delivered necessary training, modern research reveals it doesn't perfectly fit with how employees actually learn.



Current L&D strategies aren't meeting how employees actually learn

As it is now, a large part of Learning and Development's focus is on delivering educational content. Employees enroll in courses and attend training seminars. More often than not, training isn't personalized, and employees don't find it effective.

This may sting to hear but consider a survey by Degreed.

They [surveyed hundreds of executives, managers, and employees](#) to understand the state of L&D strategies today.

The overall "Net Promoter Score (NPS) for Learning and Development across organizations is -25." For context, NPS is calculated on a scale of -100 to 100. Any score below 0 is bad. With a score of -25, most participants in today's L&D programs are detractors: people who rate their L&D strategy between 0 and 6 out of 10.



Employees aren't engaged with today's training methods

Degreed shed light on employees' prevailing feelings about corporate learning: it's stale, impersonal, and ineffective.

This sounds harsh, but we need to see it for what it is.

Those who gave high NPS scores were in HR — the people delivering the training. Employees, on the other hand (especially those in non-managerial positions), gave scores as low as -33. So what we see is that HR and L&D professionals think it's working, but the employees actually doing the training say otherwise.

If employees aren't engaged, what needs to change?

Degreed's study and others pulled the curtain back on the inefficiencies of our current L&D strategies.

Companies like McKinsey have stepped up to establish new frameworks for what needs to change.



Learning and Development's role in the organization is evolving

McKinsey & Company, the global management consulting firm, started surveying executives about capability building in 2014. In 2016, they shifted to focus on the L&D space, surveying Chief Learning Officers worldwide.

[Their results were intriguing but startling.](#) McKinsey researchers determined that for L&D teams to keep pace with a rapidly changing technological economy, “corporate learning must undergo revolutionary changes.”

Revolutionary changes. What does that entail?

Learning and Development in 2008: Five strategic roles

Well, for starters, let's look at the responsibilities of L&D today. In 2008, Nick van Dam, a researcher and [author on L&D best practices](#), who was also the Chief Learning Officer at McKinsey, summarized L&D's five strategic roles:

- 1. Attract and retain talent.** People want to join companies that will contribute to their learning. A [study by Gallup](#) showed that “59% of millennials say opportunities to learn and grow are extremely important to them when applying for a job.”
- 2. Develop people capabilities.** The shelf life of skills is shortening. Organizations need to invest in their employees' upskilling. The World Economic Forum [found](#) that “54% of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling by 2022.”
- 3. Create a values-based culture.** Employee learning has the potential to build community and reinforce company values.
- 4. Build an employer brand.** Similar to attracting talent, a company with a reputation for helping its employees grow is compelling.
- 5. Motivate and engage employees.** Learning new skills and having confidence in our growth is incredibly energizing.

Those roles already cover a lot. But McKinsey sees that organizations today need to go even further than what Nick van Dam established in 2008.

Learning and Development in 2019: Nine dimensions

McKinsey outlined these “revolutionary changes” in their ACADEMIES framework. It defines the “nine dimensions that contribute to a strong L&D function”:

1. **Alignment with business strategy**
2. **Co-ownership between business units and HR**
3. **Assessment of capability gaps and estimated value**
4. **Design of learning journeys**
5. **Execution and scale-up**
6. **Measurement of impact on business performance**
7. **Integration of L&D interventions into HR processes**
8. **Enabling the 70:20:10 learning framework**
9. **Systems and learning technology applications**

The evolution of L&D adds personalized, informal learning on top of traditional formal learning

Each of these dimensions is worth reading up on, but three key themes stand out when you dig into each.

They are:

Designing individual learning journeys for every employee

Replacing annual performance appraisals with frequent, in-the-moment feedback.

Supporting formal AND informal learning

What can we draw from all this?

The future of Learning and Development is moving away from curated educational content in Learning Management Systems. The future of employee learning will move toward more personal, discussion-based learning.

Personalized, informal learning includes mentorship, peer accountability, and group discourse

Organizations are beginning to recognize that employee learning is more than taking a course, going through the necessary modules, completing a quiz, and checking the box of 'learning.'

Instead, person-to-person interactions like mentoring, peer coaching and group forums drive more meaningful learning. McKinsey researchers reaffirm this, saying,

“

Today, L&D leaders must design and implement interventions that support informal learning, including coaching and mentoring, on-the-job instruction, apprenticeships, leadership shadowing, action-based learning.”



The future of L&D is in person-to-person learning



To craft L&D strategies that are engaging for employees and drive better learning outcomes, we need to expand them beyond a simple Learning Management System. There will always be a place for online courses, but today they take up the most time and budget of L&D professionals.

Instead, we need to make more room for informal learning and work with how employees learn best — connecting them with the right kind of resources at the right time.

What is person-to-person learning?

Person-to-person learning includes:

Mentorship

Peer-to-peer coaching

Group discussions and Q&As

The benefits of person-to-person learning

Each component of person-to-person learning fits with how employees learn best.

- **They are more engaging.** Lively discussions around topics relevant to employees draw them in to participate.
- **They're more personal.** Employees bring their personal and professional goals to the table to shape a relevant learning journey.
- **They hold employees accountable.** Employees are working alongside one another to learn and grow.
- **They deliver more meaningful learning experiences.** Employees drive their own learning experiences; it's not dictated from the top down.

Including these in your current L&D strategy takes work, so let's explore how to do it in more detail.

Tactical strategies:

How to include person-to-person learning in your L&D programs

The purpose of L&D is to identify the skills the organization needs, determine if employees have those skills, and close the gap if they don't.

So how do we close those skill gaps?

[Social Learning](#) suggests that it's fewer courses and more person-to-person interactions.

Applying the 70-20-10 learning framework to L&D



Take the 70-20-10 framework, for example. It's a benchmark from research into how we learn best. Only 10% of learning comes from coursework and independent study. The remaining is direct work experience and collaboration with peers.

So how can we meet that other 90% of learning? To start, let's look at mentorship as one way.

Mentorship

Mentorship is critical to keeping employees engaged. Having someone invest in your development, guide you, and hold you accountable to accomplish your goals can do wonders to accelerate your career.

Mentorship opens doors for employees and accelerates their performance

Mentors also open doors by introducing you to key people in their networks. Overall, mentors provide new ways of thinking and informal training that a course can't compare to.

Numerous studies affirm these benefits. In a [Deloitte survey](#) of millennials, 68% of employees with mentors were more likely to stay with their employees for over five years relative to the remaining 32% without mentors.

Therefore, building the infrastructure for mentorship in your organization doesn't just help with employee training; it also increases retention.

Here's how to include mentorship in your current L&D strategy:

Get leadership on board

Starting a mentorship program in the workplace needs top-down support. If leaders aren't on board, employees will think it's a forced initiative. To sell leadership on mentorship, use hard numbers. Check out the [studies that show the benefits of mentorship](#).

When leaders see how mentorship can impact retention, employee engagement, and productivity, they'd be crazy not to [buy into your business case](#).

Find mentors across your organization

Every organization will have some form of informal mentorship. Few people are likely to call themselves a mentor outright for fear of sounding arrogant. But ask employees who's most helpful and is most invested in helping others succeed.

Those are your natural-born mentors. Find those people and get them onboard with mentoring others in a formal program.

Pair mentors and mentees

Finding every employee the perfect mentor is an impossible task. That's why you should automate the process with [Together's mentor-matching algorithm](#). It'll consider both mentor's and mentees' goals, strengths, and experience and suggest the most relevant mentors to mentees.

Then the mentee can shortlist their favourite mentors and request to be paired with them. All the while, you can sit back and know that every employee is learning from relevant mentors. Whether or not you use a tool like Together's, you should know the telltale characteristics of great mentors. Find them in this article on [mentor matching](#).

Support mentor and mentee relationships

Once you match mentors and mentees, don't leave them to figure the rest themselves. Arm them with session agendas or helpful questions, topics, and resources to spark thoughtful conversations.

This is especially important at the beginning of the relationship. Help mentors and mentees break the ice; they'll be off to the races afterward.

Peer-to-peer coaching

Peer-to-peer coaching is like mentorship but between two people on similar levels. Together's mentorship platform enables peer-to-peer learning. When a team starts a peer mentoring program, they can adjust the pairing algorithm to suggest relevant peers from across the company to each employee. This way, it can kick-start a connection that otherwise wouldn't happen.

When creating a peer coaching program, there are a few considerations. They shouldn't be on the same team or have the same manager, for starters. It presents a conflict of interest and limits the opportunity for novel connections. Instead, it's usually between employees on different teams or departments at equivalent stages of their careers.

Peers on similar career levels can help each other by:

- Being a sounding board
- Helping to identify each other's goals or next steps in their careers
- Holding each other accountable for making progress towards their goals
- Being a pillar of support through challenging times
- Learning from each other's strengths and working together to mitigate weaknesses

The main idea behind peer coaching is to build an accountability system for every employee.

To start a peer coaching initiative, here are the steps to take:

Know the goal behind peer coaching

Are you looking to onboard new hires? Do you need to help employees transition into manager roles? To increase employee engagement? Your goals will determine how you match employees.

Begin pairing

Like mentoring relationships, finding the most relevant match for every employee can be tricky. For peers, consider which teams don't connect often.

- How often do individuals on the sales team connect with those on the marketing team?
- Would there be value in building relationships there?

Consider where the best knowledge-sharing opportunities are. Then, use similar parameters for mentors and mentees: what are their goals, strengths, experience levels, and interests — pair peers along these lines.

Bring together coaching pairs in groups

After pairs have connected for a while, create space for multiple pairs to combine and have group discussions. This can create opportunities for diverse perspectives and a more robust community of accountability, and it will nurture a more collaborative culture.

Group discussions and live Q&A

So far, we've dug into mentorship and peer-to-peer coaching. Both of which are primarily one-on-one interactions.

Making space for ongoing, collaborative, growth-focused conversations

Bringing together numerous employees for focused conversations also presents unique learning opportunities. We call this group learning, and the Together team sees a ton of potential for opening up one-on-one mentoring and coaching to being more collaborative.

Why do we see this potential?

Traditional full-day seminars have their limitations

Consider the traditional training seminar: employees spend a few hours to a full day in a classroom-style learning environment. There will always be a place for this type of learning because it makes space for focused training.

But there are drawbacks to this type of training. Many employees find it disruptive to their schedules, and some studies show retention rates of information are [shockingly low](#).

These drawbacks are that the learning isn't always immediately relevant to employees. What if, instead, they had group discussions focused on building the skills they needed right now.



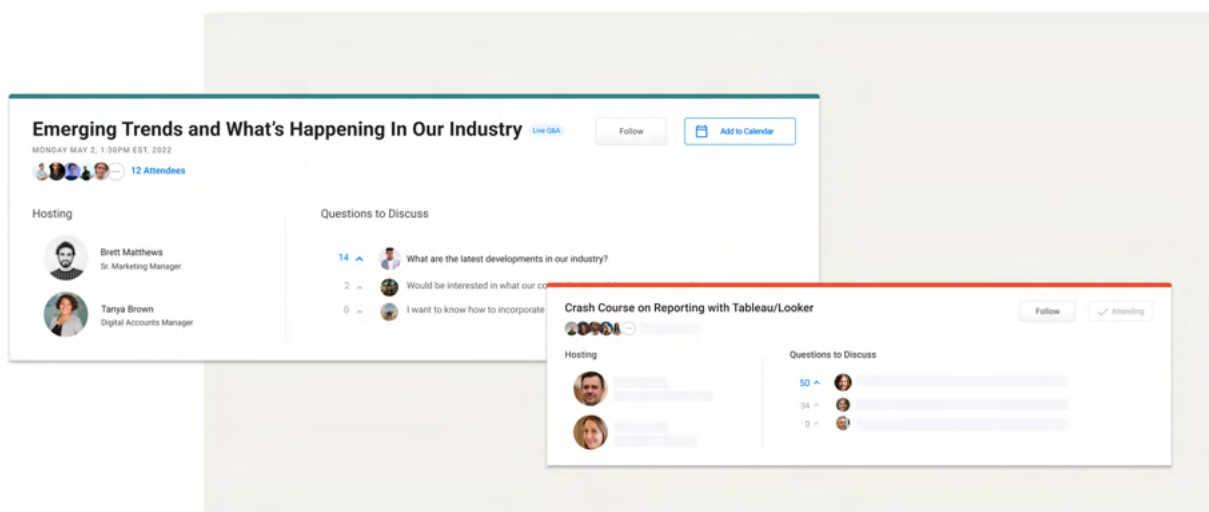
Q&A sessions provide just-in-time, relevant learning

What employees need is a Live Q&A. Sometimes employees have questions that don't require ongoing mentoring or coaching sessions. Likewise, it's not just one employee with the question. Many could learn from hearing the answer.

What our team at Together has done for mentoring programs hosted using our platform is let employees ask public questions that anyone can volunteer to answer.

Here's how Live Q&A works:

- **Employees have a space to ask a question.** For example, within a women's Employee Resource Group, a member may ask, "how can I make the most of my maternity leave?"
- **Other employees who would like to discuss that question can chime in,** saying, "I'd also like to learn more about this!" They could even ask additional questions.
- **An expert can volunteer to answer the question.** As more employees get interested in the topic, someone well-versed in the topic (in this example, someone who's just returned from maternity leave) can volunteer to host the Q&A session. In this case, we call them the expert.
- **The expert can schedule a time to have a live group discussion on the topic.** Our platform will automatically send out invites, reminders, and participants can refer back to its recording after it's over.



Think of Live Q&A like informal webinars that answer the important questions on a more ad hoc basis. The discussions are tailored to the interests, challenges, and learning that employees care about. In contrast to predetermined courses, the sessions are based on the most popular topics that employees actually want to learn about. And it's taught by an expert in the company. So whatever is discussed, it fits the context of that company. Live Q&As create space for hyper-relevant discussions that accelerate learning.

Conclusion

Here's the rub: our L&D strategies need more person-to-person interactions. There will always be a place for individual learning, but it's only a small portion of all the ways employees learn. To close skill gaps and build teams equipped to take our companies to the next level, they need growth-focused relationships:

- **Mentors to provide seasoned guidance and new perspectives.**
- **Peers to hold them accountable and support them.**
- **Groups to collaborate with, discussing common goals and challenges.**

Make space for these tactics in your current Learning and Development strategy. Employees will love it, learn more, and grow faster.

Looking for more great reading?



[Social Learning And Its Impact On Employee L&D](#)



[Why Mentorship Reinforces Employee Learning And Training](#)



[Why your Learning and Development program needs mentorship](#)



[Corporate e-Learning: Not a silver bullet for employee development](#)



[How To Build A Learning Culture: 7 Steps](#)



[6 Ways To Encourage Continuous Learning In Your Organization](#)

Interested in starting your own mentorship or peer learning program?

Book Demo