# THE EVOLVING ROLE OF LEARNING IN WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

## How the CLO will Drive Business Growth

Research report produced by GP Strategies®
in partnership with Future Workplace®

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Your workforce **transformation** partner™

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innovations to attract, develop and keep talent

# THE WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION IMPERATIVE

The accelerated pace of change presents companies with ever-shifting business demands and challenges. Workforce transformation is crucial as companies strive to attract and keep talent and to build high performing cultures that will thrive.

## Performance-driven learning is a powerful accelerator for business transformation.

Business leaders — from CEOs and business line leaders to CHROs and CLOs — recognize that an agile workforce ready to adapt and learn is fundamental for obtaining a competitive advantage.

This past year showed us the viability of remote work and collaboration to a level previously deemed impossible. Yet our global survey of more than 500 HR and business leaders points to barriers holding organizations back from building on recent breakthroughs to innovate how they build agile learning cultures ready for the next pivot.

Learning teams are challenged with the need to change a reluctance to give up traditional roles, and inadequate technology tools. These factors are hindering the development of the skills and mindsets required for meaningful and continuous business transformation.

Our findings offer a window into the waves of change impacting the workforce. Organizations are moving toward a more fluid workforce, and this means creating more seamless, consumer-grade employee and learner experiences.

We see three imperatives driving successful workforce transformation:

- **EMBRACE** an agile mindset to drive faster, better results for the business.
- **EMPOWER** learners to earn transferable credentials for workforce training programs.
- **EXTEND** education and training beyond the traditional organization boundaries to gig workers, customers, and bots.

This report is a playbook of immediate actions to pursue as you plan your strategy for 2022 and ready your organization to drive learning as an important lever for workforce transformation.

We hope you enjoy The Evolving Role of Learning in Workforce Transformation.

*The GP Strategies Team  |  The Future Workplace Team*

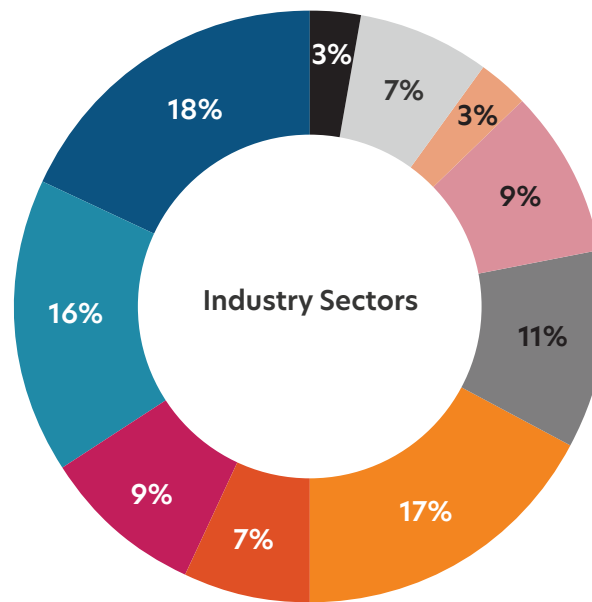# CONTENTS

# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Our research findings are based on a survey of 549 full-time working HR and business leaders globally. The survey was conducted in Q2 2021. For this survey, we asked respondents to reflect on the requirements of learning in business, workforce transformation, and the implications on their role. (Figure 1)

47% of those surveyed said they were decision makers for learning at their organizations, and 53% were identified as business leaders.

## FIGURE 1:
### Survey Demographics



**Regions**

- 39%
- 41%
- 20%
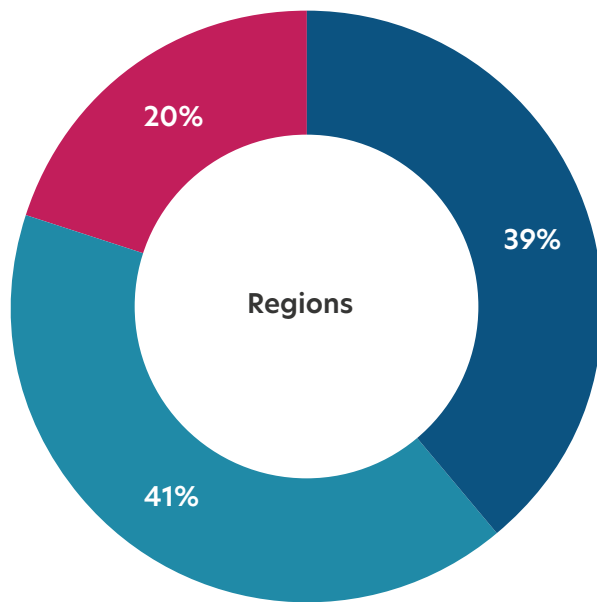
- ● North America
- ● EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa)
- ● Asia-Pacific

**Industry Sectors**

- 3%
- 7%
- 3%
- 9%
- 11%
- 17%
- 7%
- 9%
- 16%
- 18%

- ● Agriculture
- ● Automotive / Aerospace / Transportation
- ● Consulting
- ● Education
- ● Financial Services / Insurance
- ● Manufacturing
- ● Pharmaceuticals / Life Sciences
- ● Retail
- ● Technology / Telecommunications
- ● Other

### LOCATION
North America (214)
EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) (225)
Asia-Pacific (110)

### GENDER
Male (309)
Female (240)

### AGE GROUP
35-44 years (235)
25-34 years (160)
45-54 years (95)
55+ years (59)

### EMPLOYEE TYPE
Business leaders (290)
Learning leaders (259)

*Source: The Evolving Role of Learning in Workforce Transformation, Future Workplace & GP Strategies*
*Sample: N=549, 290 Business Leaders, 259 Learning Leaders*

# WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION IS ACCELERATING:
## IS YOUR TEAM READY?

Our research and work with leading global organizations identifies **three major trends** underscoring the role of learning in workforce transformation.

# TREND 1:
## Learning Moves Beyond Traditional Organizational Boundaries. Bots Learn alongside Full-Time Employees.

## KEY FINDINGS:

Organizations will not be going back to business as usual in how and where they deliver learning. (Figure 2)

FIGURE 2:
How will the learning function change once workers fully return to the office?
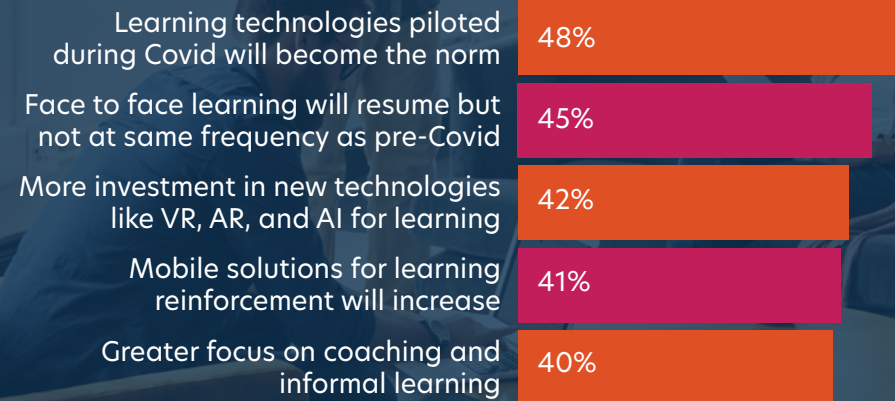
| | |
|---|---|
| Learning technologies piloted during Covid will become the norm | 48% |
| Face to face learning will resume but not at same frequency as pre-Covid | 45% |
| More investment in new technologies like VR, AR, and AI for learning | 42% |
| Mobile solutions for learning reinforcement will increase | 41% |
| Greater focus on coaching and informal learning | 40% |

## TREND 1:
**Learning Moves Beyond Traditional Organizational Boundaries. Bots Learn alongside Full-Time Employees.**

### KEY FINDINGS:

Organizations are expanding their learning audiences to encompass more part-time/gig workers, service providers, customers and even bots. (Figure 3)

### FIGURE 3:
### The Learning Audience Expands to New Stakeholders

The learning department of the future will increasingly expand its audience to include service providers, customers, and bots to build loyalty and earn revenue.

### Change from 2021 to 2025

**2021**                                                                **2025**

**11%** Of learning and business leaders **expect to have bots in their learning audience** → **16%**

**17%** Of leaders **expect to have gig workers in their learning audience** → **26%**

**13%** Of leaders **expect to have customers in their learning audience** → **19%**

# TREND 2:
## Workers Demand a Consumer-Grade, Seamless, and Dynamic Tech User Experience

## KEY FINDINGS:

Learners expect a "High Touch" and "High Tech" experience whether they are working from home, in the office, or a hybrid of both. Learning teams are working to meet this demand. (Figure 4)

Users are looking for a personalized "Spotify Experience" in corporate learning, with playlists, recommendations and transparent reviews.

FIGURE 4:
Learning Teams Plan to Create More Dynamic User Experiences by 2025

**Organizations are working to create learning experiences more comparable to what learners already have on their smartphones, home digital assistants, and AI bots at work.**

**4 IN 10** plan to pursue virtual reality

**36%** expect to use artificial intelligence

More than a **1/3** will advance mobile access platforms

## TREND 2:
**Workers Demand a Consumer-Grade, Seamless, and Dynamic Tech User Experience**

WE ASKED LEADERS:
What do you expect will be the top challenges your learning function will face this year?

**43%** of respondents identify the need to upskill their learning and development team members as a top challenge

FIGURE 5:
Top Challenges for the Learning Function in 2021

**Increased learner expectations bring new pressures to learning teams**

**Challenges facing the learning function this year**

| Challenge | % |
|---|---|
| Upskilling learning and development professionals | 43% |
| Having a plan to drive innovation of learning | 41% |
| Building a culture of lifelong learning | 39% |
| Re-designing learning from face-to-face to virtual | 36% |
| Reducing cost per person of learning | 36% |
| Measurement of learning | 35% |
| Transforming our learning function | 34% |
| Obtaining buy-in support from business leaders | 28% |
| Understanding the latest ecosystem of learning providers | 28% |
| Implementing a governance process | 24% |

# TREND 3:
## Business Leaders Lean on Learning to Deliver Business Transformation

## KEY FINDINGS:

Leaders see business acumen as the most critical capability for learning teams. (Figure 6)

FIGURE 6:
Top Ten Learning Capabilities for Workforce Transformation

**For learning professionals, business acumen (understanding context and challenges of their industry) will be the most in demand capability by 2025.**

| Capability | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| Business acumen | 46% |
| Data analytics & metrics | 44% |
| Growth mindset | 42% |
| Technology acumen | 42% |
| Internal marketing | 41% |
| Inclusive mindset | 39% |
| Commercial mindset | 39% |
| Agility in approach | 38% |
| Cloud platforms | 37% |
| Digital curation | 37% |
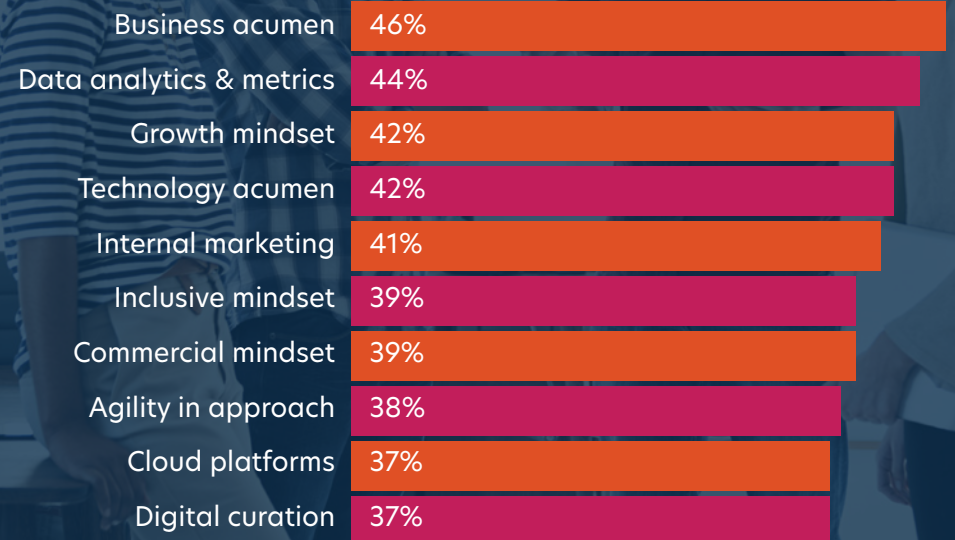
# Building organizational capacity for transformation requires an agile and digitally fluent learning organization.

## KEY FINDING:

Our research points to the disconnect between what business leaders and learning leaders believe to be the top challenges in building a high-performing learning organization. (Figure 7)

FIGURE 7:
Business & Learning Leaders Identify Top Barriers to High-Performing Learning Organizations

| What are the Top Barriers to Becoming a High-Performing Learning Organization? | Business Leaders | Learning Leaders |
|---|---|---|
| Giving up traditional L&D roles | 41% | 26% |
| Inability to execute, define, and drive outcomes | 36% | 22% |
| Business problems not clearly defined | 36% | 26% |
| Limited capacity for change | 28% | 41% |
| Unclear accountability | 23% | 41% |

Business leaders see the need to give up traditional L&D roles and the inability to execute, define, and drive outcomes as the top barriers to creating a high-performing learning organization. Learning leaders, on the other hand, cite their function's limited capacity for change and unclear accountability as their top issues. (Figure 7)

# BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LEARNING:
## 5 VITAL ACTIONS

# 1

## Map Learning Strategy and Metrics to Business Transformation Readiness

Learning leaders need to develop business acumen and growth mindsets to drive transformation. One way to better align learning with business priorities is for the learning function to operate at the speed of business.

When we asked survey respondents to reflect on key impact measures for the learning function of the future, innovation climbed to number one in importance. The traditional metrics of measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of learning ranked as numbers two and three in importance.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT:

*"We see accelerated demand for 'future of work' skills. The pace of delivery is critical. We need to operate at twice the speed and be ready with our upskilling strategy when new demands emerge."*

- Head of Enterprise Learning & Development and Workforce of the Future, MetLife

By **2025**, innovation will be the **#1** learning impact measure.

# 2

## Develop Technology and Business Acumen for Your Learning Organization

As the technology landscape continues to accelerate, there are a number of new learning capabilities and job roles that need to be created to meet the needs of workforce transformation.

### Emerging Job Roles Speak to the Importance of Business and Digital Transformation

From digital marketing leader (78%) and continuous learning leader (75%), to remote work coach (73%) and transformation leader (71%), the new job roles for learning teams are centered around technology and transformation. (Figure 8)

**78%** see the Digital Marketing Leader as a key new job role for the learning function.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT:

*"We need our team to be the bridge between the learning experience and the business, anticipating where business leaders want to go. This type of performance consulting requires strong communication skills, business acumen, and the ability to translate stakeholder needs into design and technology requirements. It's the learning equivalent of the HR business partner."*

- L&D Skills & Development Leader, Customer Experience & Success, Microsoft

# 2

## FIGURE 8:
## Emerging Job Roles for Learning Innovation

| Role | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Digital marketing leader | 78% |
| Cloud platform specialist | 77% |
| Continuous learning leader | 75% |
| Learning experience leader | 73% |
| Remote work coach | 73% |
| Internal talent mobility leader | 71% |
| Transformation leader | 71% |
| Immersive Technology leader | 70% |
| Learning design sprint leader/agile coach | 69% |
| Chatbot coach/trainer | 66% |
| Head of learning neuroscience | 63% |
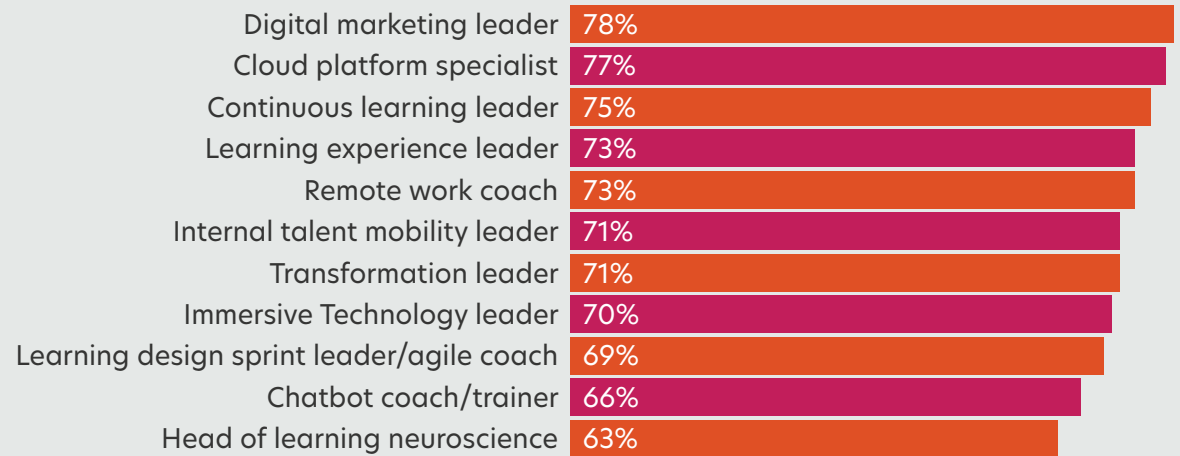
According to Jeanne Meister, Founder, Future Workplace, "Just as the HR function has created many new job roles such as Director of Remote Work and Employee Well-Being Leader, the learning function must also take stock of what is needed to deliver workforce transformation and create new job roles focused on building new capabilities in digital marketing, immersive learning and agile methodologies."

# 3

## Unleash the Potential of Emerging Technologies and Human Capabilities

**Learning teams need to more rapidly explore and test new technologies and stay open to new solutions — from artificial intelligence to cloud platforms.**

When respondents were asked about the top learning and development innovations they expect their organizations to pursue this year, virtual reality (VR) was ranked #2, with mobile access platforms and employee experience platform (EXPs) following. (Figure 9, page 17)

According to Matt Donovan, Chief Learning & Innovation Officer at GP Strategies, "When we talk about transformation, organizations need to be open to thinking about new ways of working and potential growth opportunities for the business. Companies must cultivate new skillsets and mindsets needed for innovation to drive real transformation such as creative problem solving, collaboration, and leading through uncertainty. It is this combination of technology acumen and core human skills that will produce lasting results, drive new product introductions and more inclusive cultures."

**INDUSTRY INSIGHT:**

*"We need a learner-centric mindset when it comes to design. Through our annual surveys of learners and business partners we see increased demand for a more personalized learner experience tailored to each individual's experience and knowledge."*
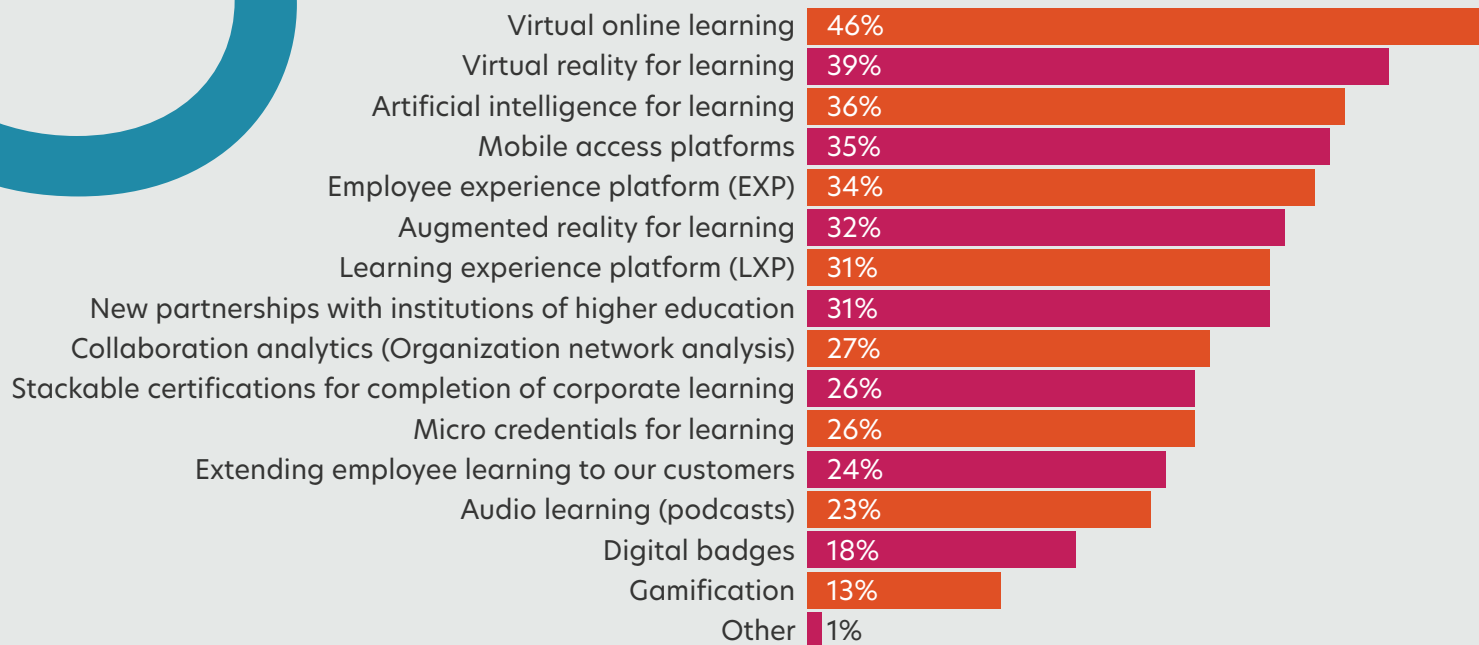
- Senior Manager, Center of Learning, General Motors

**REGIONAL HIGHLIGHT:**

Leaders in China are more likely to invest in new technology and mobile solutions than those in the U.S., Germany, or the UK/Ireland.

# 3

## FIGURE 9:
## Top Learning Innovations for Workforce Transformation

| Learning Innovation | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Virtual online learning | 46% |
| Virtual reality for learning | 39% |
| Artificial intelligence for learning | 36% |
| Mobile access platforms | 35% |
| Employee experience platform (EXP) | 34% |
| Augmented reality for learning | 32% |
| Learning experience platform (LXP) | 31% |
| New partnerships with institutions of higher education | 31% |
| Collaboration analytics (Organization network analysis) | 27% |
| Stackable certifications for completion of corporate learning | 26% |
| Micro credentials for learning | 26% |
| Extending employee learning to our customers | 24% |
| Audio learning (podcasts) | 23% |
| Digital badges | 18% |
| Gamification | 13% |
| Other | 1% |

Looking ahead to 2025, those in the financial services, insurance, manufacturing, transportation, or life sciences industries rank learning technology acumen to be just as important as those working in the technology or telecommunications industries.
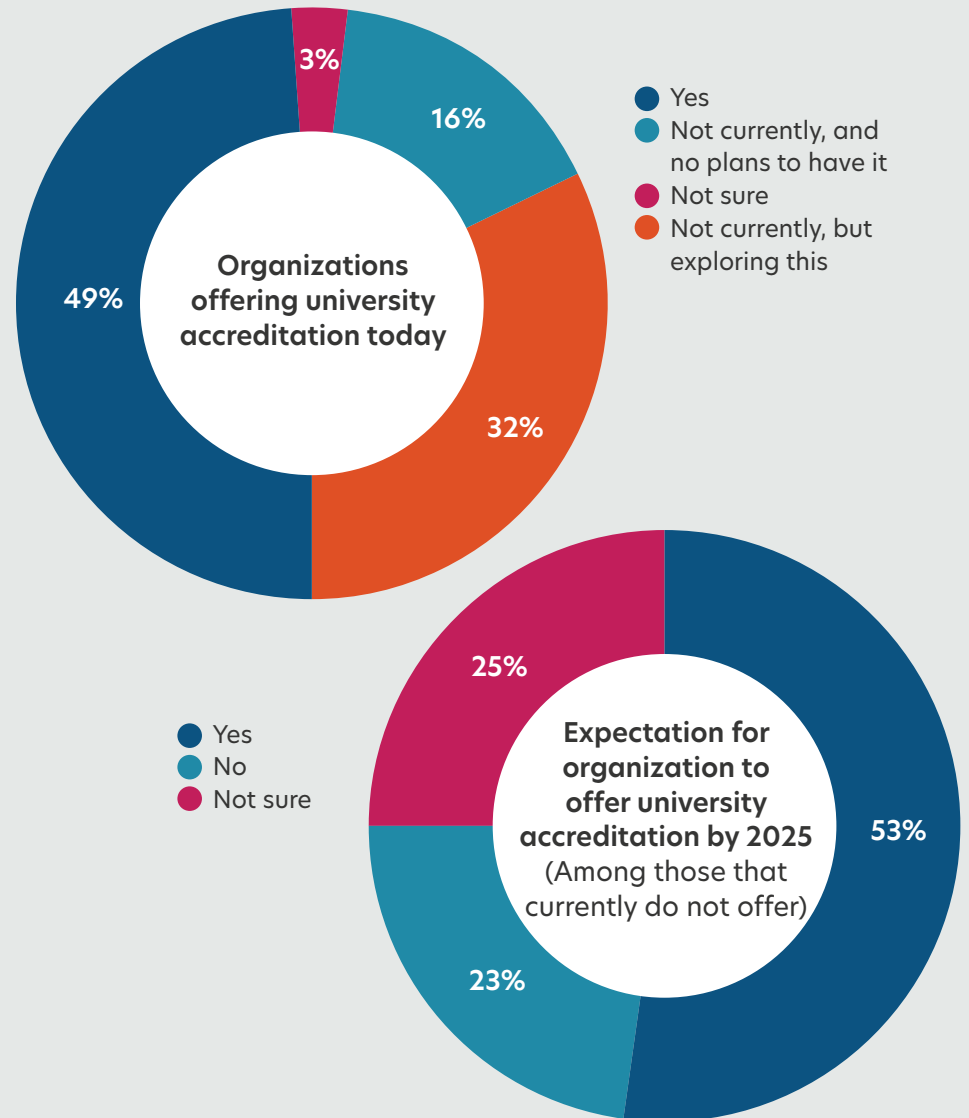
# 4

## Create New Partnerships to Provide Credentials for Corporate Learning Programs

When it comes to corporate/university partnerships, half of the organizations we surveyed are currently offering college/university accreditation for their learning programs, and among those without it, there is a strong expectation for this offering by 2025. (Figure 10)

The trend is clear: an increased number of companies expect to form partnerships with institutions of higher education to offer accreditation of corporate training programs.

**Organizations offering university accreditation today**

- 49% Yes
- 16% Not currently, and no plans to have it
- 3% Not sure
- 32% Not currently, but exploring this



**Expectation for organization to offer university accreditation by 2025**
(Among those that currently do not offer)

- 53% Yes
- 23% No
- 25% Not sure

# 5

## Fully Reimagine Learning

As we look to the future, learning and working will not be linear. Rather we will see a new marketplace for learning, with some companies creating paid apprenticeships, offering learners the opportunity to work, earn and learn at the same time.

**The Learning-Working-Retiring paradigm is shifting to a continuous cycle of working, earning and learning.**

**LEARNING - WORKING - RETIRING** →  WORKING → EARNING → LEARNING →

For companies, the benefit of this new paradigm is the opportunity to attract workers from a range of ages and a variety of education and career backgrounds, leading to a more diverse talent pool.

This new paradigm of working, earning, and learning is one way to solve for the lack of inclusivity in talent pipelines and L&D solutions. Our research found that nearly a third of leaders see this lack of inclusiveness as one of the barriers to becoming a high-performing learning organization. This is likely to continue to be a top-of-mind issue for organizations seeking to transform, as cultures of inclusion are critical drivers of creativity, innovation, and high performance.
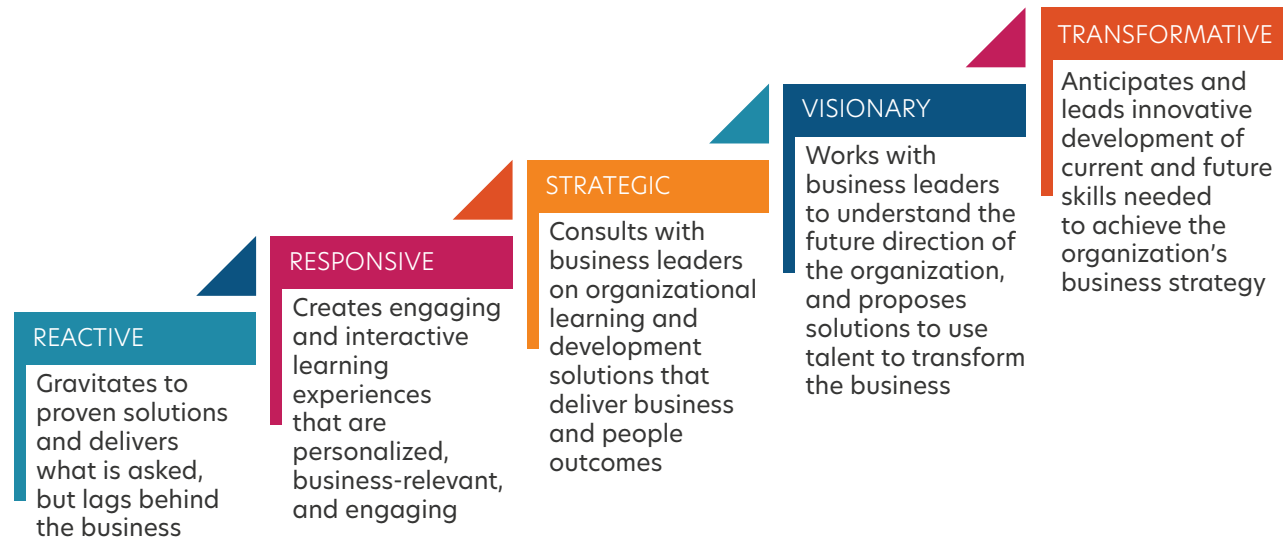
# TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER ROLE AND THE CORPORATE LEARNER IN 2030

# A New Maturity Model for Today's Transformation CLO

Development can be tapped as a tool for workforce transformation. Like all leaders, CLOs are working with business leaders to chart the course to build capabilities needed for the future. CLOs will be instrumental in defining how, when, and where people work and learn, the alignment of learning to workforce transformation, and the creation of new learning skills, capabilities, and job roles needed to take greater ownership of business success from the frontlines through the C-Suite.

FIGURE 11:
CLO Maturity Model: The Need to Be a Transformative Talent Builder

**TRANSFORMATIVE**
Anticipates and leads innovative development of current and future skills needed to achieve the organization's business strategy

**VISIONARY**
Works with business leaders to understand the future direction of the organization, and proposes solutions to use talent to transform the business

**STRATEGIC**
Consults with business leaders on organizational learning and development solutions that deliver business and people outcomes

**RESPONSIVE**
Creates engaging and interactive learning experiences that are personalized, business-relevant, and engaging

**REACTIVE**
Gravitates to proven solutions and delivers what is asked, but lags behind the business

# Implications for the Future Role of the CLO

As we look to the future, CLOs have the opportunity and the responsibility to become key C-suite players by expanding their lens beyond learning and development to encompass the transformation of the workforce and to meet business goals.

As CLO's embark on this journey, we encourage every learning leader to consider these 3E's:

**The 3 Es of Workforce Transformation**

- **Embrace an Agile Mindset** - Challenge every assumption with a business lens to look for new tools and ways of operating. Pilot and test new approaches, technologies, and systems, and find partners who will help you accelerate and enhance your process.

- **Empower Learners to Earn Transferable Credentials** - Chart a course to develop partnerships with institutions of higher education, boot camps, B2B or B2C corporate universities, and individuals with subject matter expertise to position learners and the company for success. Ensure learners take accountability for the learning experience, while the organization provides the ecosystem to support them when, how, and where they need it.

- **Extend Learning Beyond Full-Time Employees** - Broaden your definition of the audience for learning to include suppliers, gig workers, customers, and even bots to uncover new ways to build value with stakeholders.

CLOs and learning teams need to develop all of these capabilities as they play a more strategic role for the business. They will need to understand market dynamics and their competitive landscape, develop both business acumen and commercial acumen, take an experimental approach to creating a new paradigm for working, earning, and learning, and have a more sophisticated ability to apply analytics to their role. They also need to become performance consultants - identifying the optimal solutions to solve business needs and prepare for the future.

For more information on our research or insights on The role of Learning in Workforce Transformation, contact us: **info@gpstrategies.com** or **1.888.843.4784**

# Business Transformation Through Learning:
## 5 ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW

**1** **Map Learning Strategy and Metrics to Business Transformation Readiness**

**2** **Develop Technology and Business Acumen for Your Learning Organization**

**3** **Unleash the Potential of Emerging Technologies and Human Capabilities**

**4** **Create New Partnerships to Provide Credentials for Corporate Learning Programs**

**5** **Fully Reimagine Learning**

### Are you linking your learning strategy to business transformation?

**ASK YOURSELF:**
1. Do you have a Learner Experience Playbook that supports your learning brand?
2. Do you have a measurement map in place?
3. Do you have a defined brand for your learning organization?
4. Are you engaging your business partners on their terms?

### Are you enabling your learning organization with an innovation capability?

**ASK YOURSELF:**
1. Do you have a sustainable approach to innovation for the learning organization?
2. Do you have a learning technology roadmap?
3. Are you proactively partnering with IT and HR in mapping the tools to support the organization?
4. Are you optimizing the investments you have made already?

### Are you tuned in to the future skill needs of the changing landscape of employees?

**ASK YOURSELF:**
1. Do you have a modern performance and skills architecture in place?
2. Are you continuously scanning the environment for emerging or evolving skills?
3. Have you explored new approaches to provide credentialing?
4. Do you have a mechanism for those on the front lines to share what they are seeing?

### Are you ready to reimagine learning?

**ASK YOURSELF:**
1. Have you created space and expectations for learners to take accountability for their learning journey?
2. Are you building the ecosystem required to support the learners throughout their journey?
3. Are you creating critical new roles to support learners in the new learning system?
4. Do you have an agile change management approach in place to support the shift in learning culture?

## About GP Strategies

GP Strategies is a global workforce transformation provider of organizational and technical performance solutions. GP Strategies' solutions improve the performance of organizations by delivering innovative and superior training, consulting, and business improvement services customized to meet the specific needs of its clients. Clients include Fortune 500 companies, automotive, financial services, technology, aerospace and defense industries, and other commercial and government customers. Additional information can be found at **gpstrategies.com**.

## About Future Workplace

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