

The future of learning: It's personal

How the fusion of technology and personalization will transform learning

Jump to a section:

- 1 94% of learners want personalization
- 2 Organizations value different things
- 3 The business case for personalized learning
- 4 The challenge of personalization across modalities
- 5 Technology to the rescue. AI is a catalyst to scaled personalization
- 6 Key takeaways



Effective learning programs must spark learner motivation, the one factor proven to improve learning outcomes.

As emerging technologies reshape how we design and deliver learning, they open the door to the scalability organizations want. But in the push to expand efficiency, how do we safeguard the learner motivation that really matters?

In this report, we'll explore:

- 1 The future of learning and how to balance scalability with learner experience
- 2 Findings from the joint Insights/ATD report, **The Human Tech Interface: Finding the Right Blend in Learning Design**
- 3 How learner needs, training formats and technologies like AI are creating new opportunities for organizations to keep learners at the center

94% of learners want personalization

Features like activity selection, pacing, goal setting and the ability to receive feedback rank high in the research.

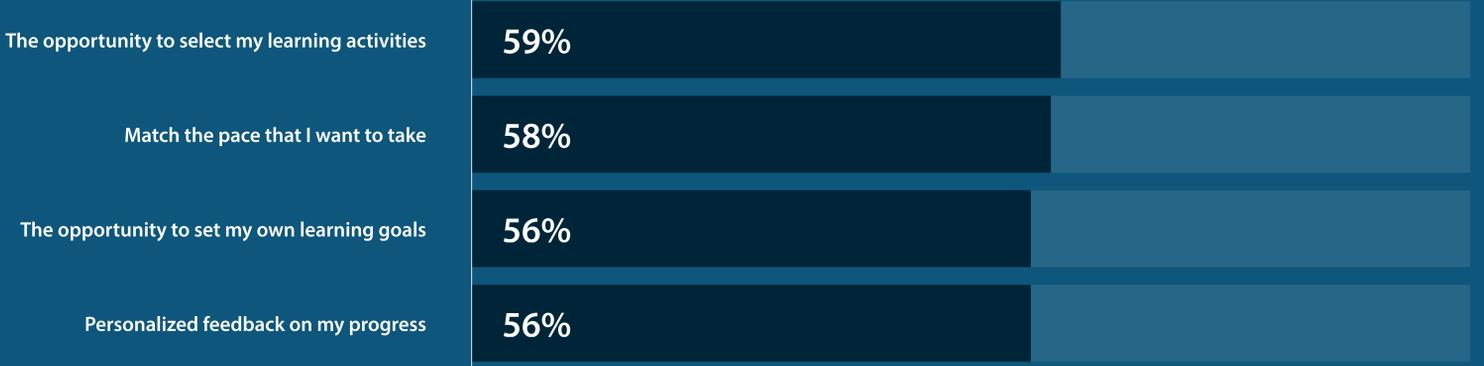
We asked:

When taking a training course, how important is it that your training is personalized to meet your needs?



We asked:

How important are each of the following when personalizing your learning? (% Indicating extremely important)



85%

of learners find human-facilitated learning (in both classroom and virtual settings) to be the most motivating; a significant point when we consider that motivation is a driver of learning outcomes.

Learners want...

- ✓ **A personalized approach** (94%)
- ✓ **Human instructors for classroom & virtual training** (85% prefer it, 87% say it's the most effective)
- ✓ **Hands-on activities** (89%)
- ✓ **Freedom to choose learning activities** (59%)
- ✓ **Freedom to set one's own goals** (56%) and pace (58%)
- ✓ **Personalized feedback** (56%)

If we look at the reasons learners prefer human-facilitated learning through the lens of personalization, the connection is clear:

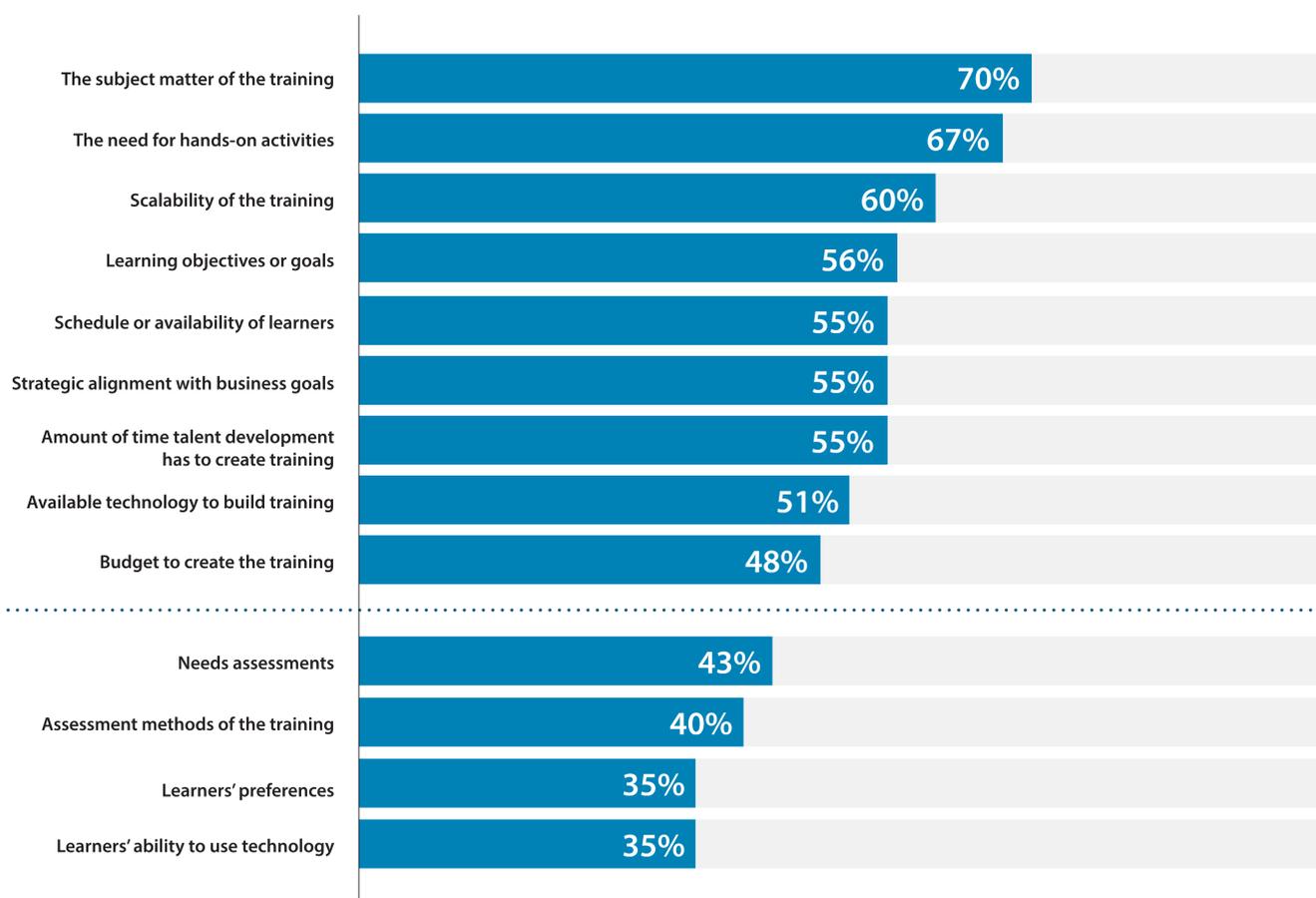


But organizations value different things

Components of personalization like learner preferences and ability come last in consideration when organizations invest in different modalities...

We asked:

How important are the following in helping you determine if learning is offered live, with a human facilitator or asynchronous with a digital experience?

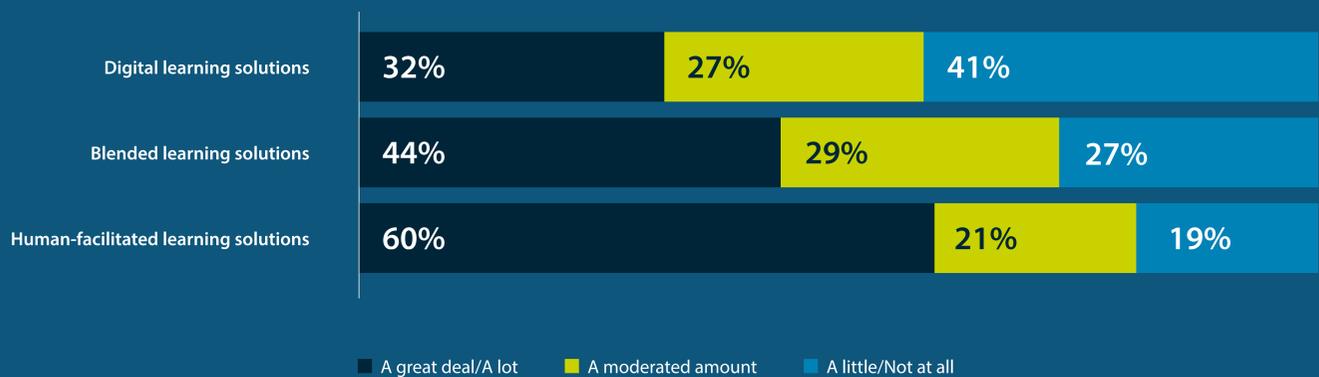


When digital learning scales, personalization shrinks

Unsurprisingly, organizations personalize human-facilitated learning more and digital learning less

We asked:

How much are your organizations personalizing to each learner's needs or preferences?



60%

Learning professionals who personalize human-facilitated learning solutions

32%

Learning professionals who personalize digital learning solutions

The result is a gap between what learners want and what many learning solutions provide; a gap that can weaken motivation and reduce overall effectiveness

What's driving the gap?

Human-facilitated learning gives facilitators ample opportunity to personalize learning. For example, adapting their communication style to engage different communication preferences in the group, keeping that critical motivation factor high.

On the other side of the spectrum, what fully asynchronous learning may lack in human warmth or real-time feedback, it makes up for with consistent delivery and standards, ease of scheduling and cost-efficient scalability.

But as organizations move toward blended and digital delivery, personalized support (like needs based pathways and facilitator feedback) gets lost. Motivation is at risk.



The business case for personalized learning

Many in the industry believe that when training feels personal, people perform better and stay more engaged. But as L&D teams face growing pressure to show the business impact of their programs, it helps to look at what the data says...



1 Personalization is linked to learning outcomes

In the academic world, The Effects of Personalized Learning on Achieving Meaningful Learning Outcomes (2021) report showed that personalized learning could lead to significant improvement in content mastery, cognitive, agentic, and emotional engagement, as well as self-regulated learning².

In the corporate world, a Brandon Hall Group study showed that companies using personalized learning saw a 69% increase in employee engagement and a 42% increase in productivity.

2 Personalization is linked to learning motivation (which is also linked to outcomes)

A 2024 study³ found that, provided personalization approaches have a positive impact on motivation, they must be grounded in Self-Determination Theory principles:

- ✓ **Incorporating autonomy** (feeling in control of our actions)
- ✓ **Competence** (feeling effective and capable)
- ✓ **Relatedness** (feeling connected to others)

Integrating principles like choice, constructive feedback, and meaningful relationship-based encouragement correlates to improved outcomes.

The challenge of personalization across modalities

Personalization is difficult to weave through blended and virtual learning modalities at scale.

We already know that motivation drives better learning outcomes. If personalization contributes to increased motivation, the rationale for investing in personalization is strong.



Personalization potential by modality

Personalization across modalities enhances learner engagement and therefore improves outcomes.

Each modality presents different opportunities when it comes to delivering the personalized learning learners want...

Human-facilitated learning 	Blended learning 	Asynchronous digital learning 
<p>60% personalize 'a great deal'</p>	<p>44% personalize 'a great deal'</p>	<p>32% personalize 'a great deal'</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengths: engagement, psychological safety, motivation, trust, cohort-building, hands-on activities. Limitations: scheduling conflicts, course updates, participation variability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengths: combines personal interaction with digital flexibility. Limitations: ensuring participation in both components, scheduling coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengths: flexible, scalable, consistent, cost-effective. Limitations: potential for passive engagement, technology access/competency concerns.
<p>Personalization potential: Medium</p>	<p>Personalization potential: High</p>	<p>Personalization potential: High</p>
<p>Cost-effective scalability potential: Low</p>	<p>Cost-effective scalability potential: High</p>	<p>Cost-effective scalability potential: High</p>

Technology to the rescue. AI is a catalyst to scaled personalization

As AI becomes ubiquitous in the workplace, two-thirds of organizations now use learner-facing AI tools (anything from chatbots and adaptive learning systems to virtual coaching and gamification), but this is the thin end of the wedge that AI can empower.

When the challenge is delivering meaningful personalization at scale, AI can complement human facilitators in adapting learning journeys to different experience levels, individual goals and content complexity.

In the future, AI will enable organizations to deliver personalized learning at scale while maintaining learner motivation and achieving meaningful results.

Common AI applications in L&D today



- Personalized/adaptive learning pathways
- Chatbots for support
- Gamification
- Translation/localization
- Virtual coaching



The future of AI-supported workplace learning...

Personalized learning APIs

Integrating personalized learning APIs into HR software and training programs to adapt content and delivery based on experience, personality preferences and other broadly applicable learning principles like spaced learning and feedback.

A power surge of human skills

As AI becomes more capable, human-centered skills will become essential.

Organizations will increasingly value skills like empathy, communication, collaboration and creative problem-solving.

L&D's role will evolve to cultivate these human strengths at scale, ensuring employees can work effectively with AI while bringing emotional intelligence and judgment to the table.

Just-in-time microlearning

More just-in-time microlearning instead of longer courses, automated and delivered within tools like Slack, Teams, and proprietary CRMs. AI assistants will guide employees as they perform tasks, collaborate with colleagues and interact with technology.

Enhanced measurement

Personalized learning, supported by AI, will generate richer, more actionable data on learner engagement, motivation and outcomes.

AI will predict when learners need support and recommend adjustments to improve results.

This shift will move measurement from periodic reviews to continuous, data-driven understanding of impact, giving organizations a clearer view of what works and what needs to change.

Engaging learning experiences at scale

AI will deliver real-time insights and instantly integrate learner feedback to make learning experiences motivating and intuitive.

It will adjust content, pacing, and support as people learn, so uniquely personalized learning for each employee becomes the norm. organizations a clearer view of what works and what needs to change.

Key takeaways

Organizations are great at personalizing human-facilitated learning, but struggle with scaling personalization digitally.



60%

of learning professionals personalize human-facilitated programs



Only 32%

personalize digital programs

94%

of learners want personalized content

Future of learning design includes:

- ✓ Personalization APIs
- ✓ Just-in-time microlearning
- ✓ Scaled and engaging learning experiences
- ✓ Focus on human skills
- ✓ Enhanced measurement