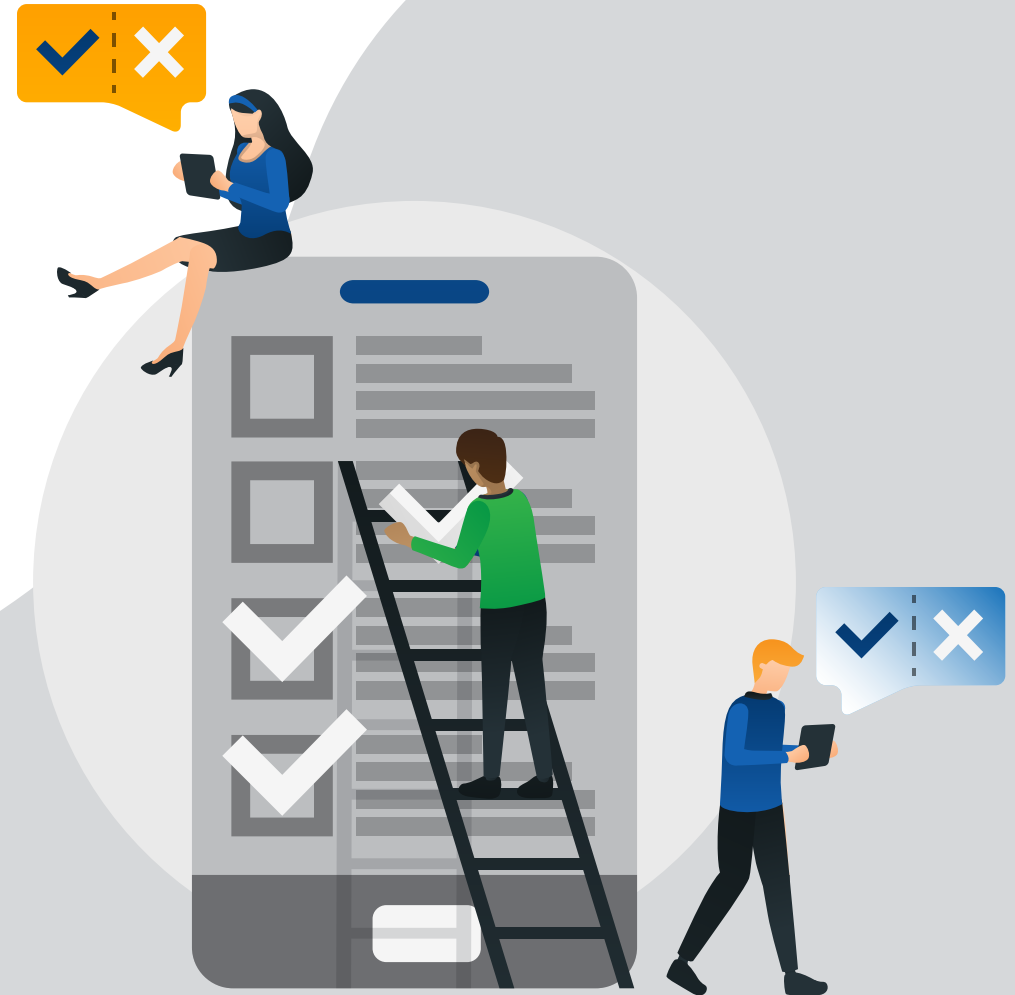# 2021 Trends: Learning and Development in a COVID World

Over 1,000 leadership, learning, and talent development professionals participated in The Ken Blanchard Companies® 2021 HR/L&D Trends Survey.
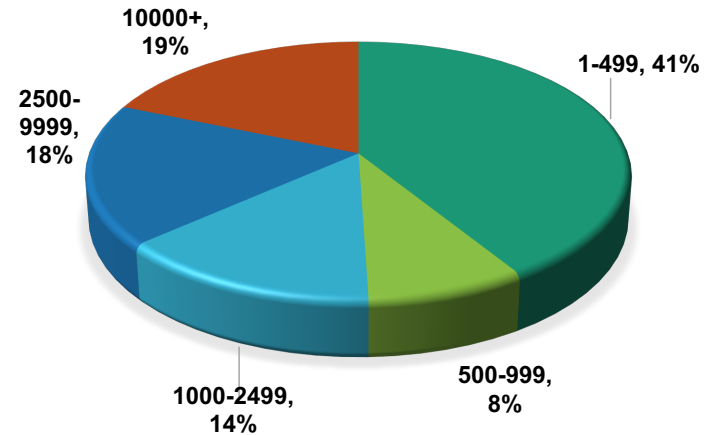
Participants represented all levels within the leadership, learning, and talent development function from organizations of all sizes.

What is your level in the organization?

Administrative, 3%
C-Level, 11%
Vice President, 6%
Specialist, 24%
Director, 25%
Manager, 31%
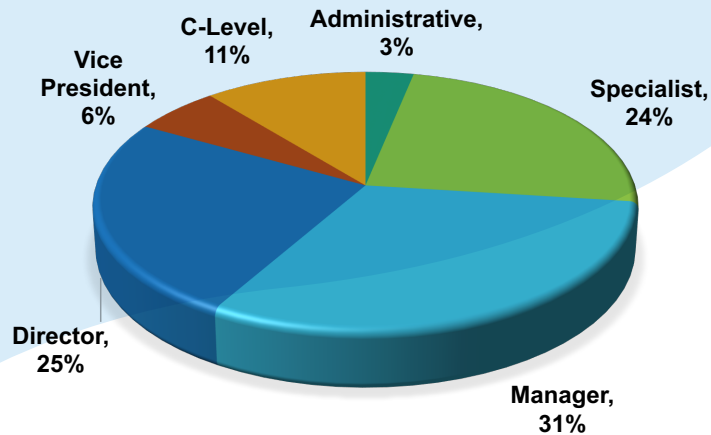
What is the total number of employees globally in your organization?

10000+, 19%
2500-9999, 18%
1-499, 41%
1000-2499, 14%
500-999, 8%

Participants identified the biggest challenge their teams are facing due to COVID-19 and how they plan to respond in the coming year.

When asked to identify the single largest problem their L&D team is currently facing due to COVID-19 going into the new year, respondents shared over 1,000 individual responses.

In analyzing the data, three main themes appeared.

THEME 1
Successfully making the shift to virtual and online learning

Respondents identified concerns about learner engagement, participation, and attendance in digital and virtual solutions as a result of rapidly assembled and converted in-house designs.

Many mentioned coping with feelings of loss from the absence of in-person training.

Others worried about their rapidly evolving role and expectations leading to concerns about skills gaps in their own departments. Specifically called out were design expertise, virtual facilitation, and the skillful leveraging of new tools and platforms.

Ongoing logistical and technical challenges were also identified such as session scheduling, clunky platforms, and connectivity issues.

THEME 2
Helping a workforce struggling emotionally with implications of COVID-19 and working remotely

Respondents identified isolation and a loss of connection as two large concerns leading to increased stress, exhaustion, overwhelm, and burnout.

Also mentioned were the overriding uncertainty present in the current work environment and a sense of too much change occurring too fast.

Finally, respondents acknowledged a sense of lowered morale and virtual fatigue.

THEME 3
Concerns about their L&D jobs

Closer to home, respondents identified budget cuts, layoffs, furloughs, and questions of management support as being top of mind closing out 2020 and looking ahead to 2021.

The concern was that 2021 would usher in a difficult period of high expectations for converting to digital and virtual delivery, but without the resources and support necessary to be successful. This was often expressed as "too much to do, not enough resources."
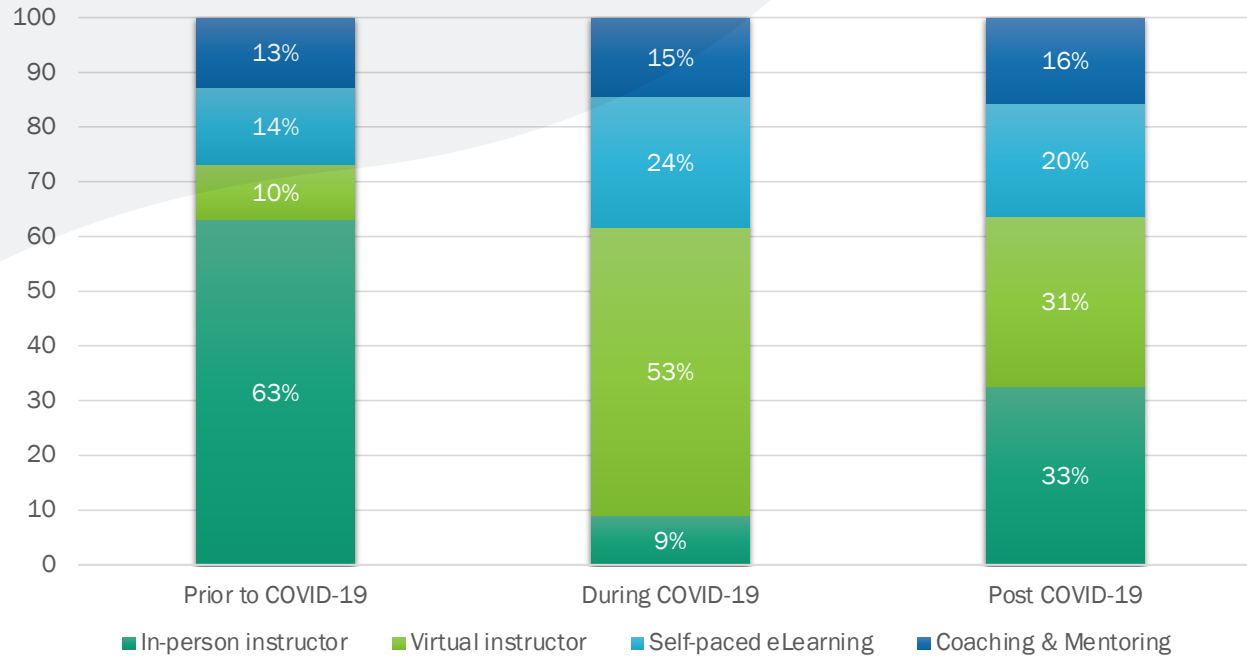
"COVID-19 created a discontinuity in the normal evolutionary path toward digital and virtual. It has accelerated the shift—possibly by as much as a decade."

—Jay Campbell
SVP of products and development
The Ken Blanchard Companies

Learning and Development Trends for 2021

Representative of that shift was the quick pivot L&D professionals made to convert face-to-face training into virtual instructor-led training, with classroom training dropping from 63% to 9% and virtual increasing from 10% to 53%. Self-paced eLearning also saw a bump upward from 14% to 24%.

Which of the following best describes your experience
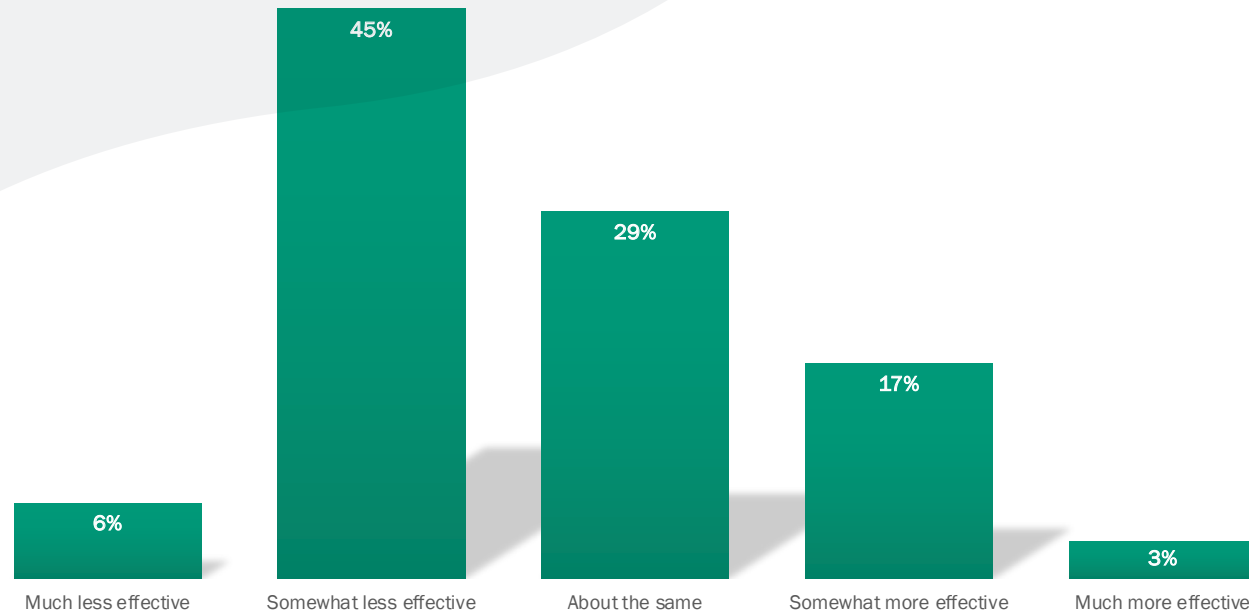reaching remote learners in an effective way? Choose one that best applies.
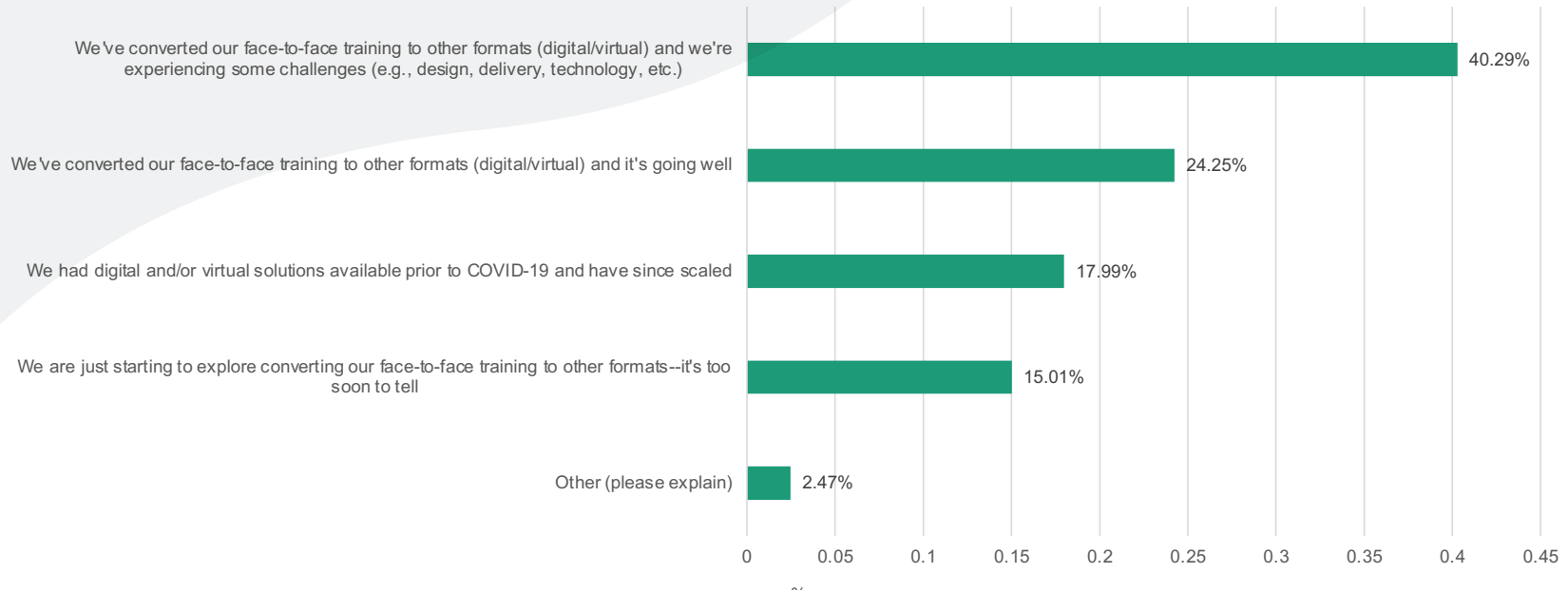
This rapid shift to virtual and digital learning was not without its challenges. Some 40% of respondents found the design, delivery, and successful use of technology to be difficult.

For more information about designing engaging virtual sessions, read the Ebook A Jump Start for Virtual Facilitation

Effectiveness of Virtual

6%	45%	29%	17%	3%
Much less effective	Somewhat less effective	About the same	Somewhat more effective	Much more effective

The final product also suffered. More than 51% of respondents felt their new digital/virtual offerings were somewhat or much less effective than the face-to-face designs they were replacing.

What would make your digital/virtual designs better?
Choose all that apply.

More learner engagement	More social interaction	More learning touch points over time	More integration of work tasks	More accountability to finish	Easier to use technology	Better overall quality of the program	Ease of access	More video
19.38%	15.32%	14.47%	11.60%	10.21%	8.70%	7.53%	6.08%	5.36%
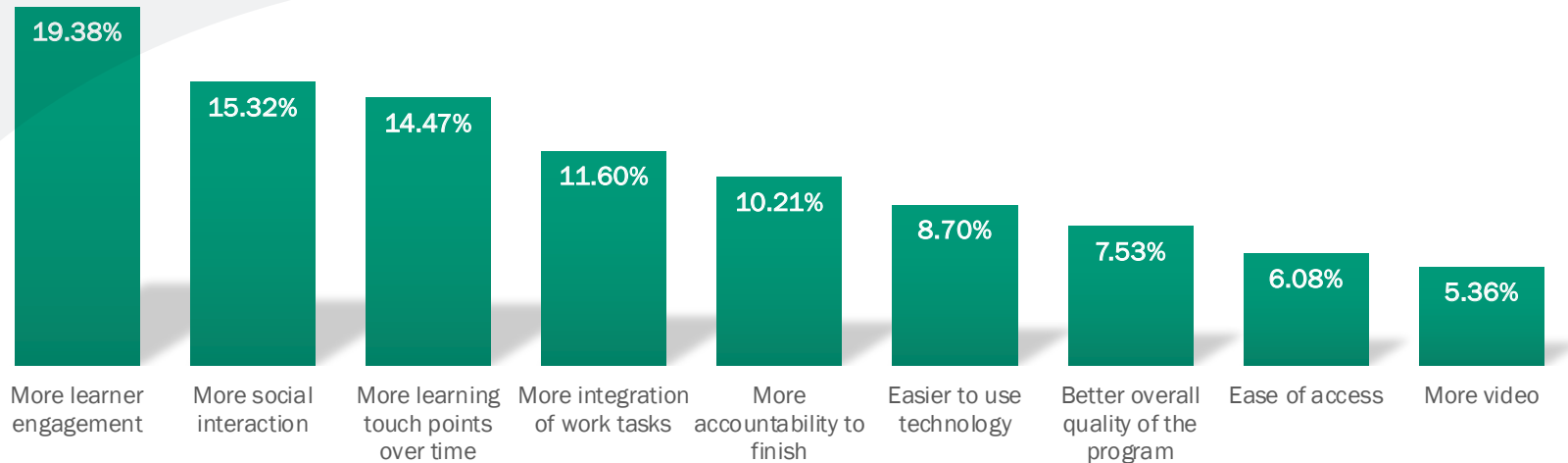
In looking at ways to improve their digital and virtual designs, respondents identified learner engagement, social interaction, and more learning touch points as the three top areas for improvement.

If you could improve one thing about the learning
and development program in your organization, what would it be?

Category	Percentage
Lack of resources to hold people accountable after training	31.14%
Quality of adapted training programs	18.86%
Digital skills of trainers	11.28%
Infrastructure issues (e.g. internet connections, computers availability etc.)	9.98%
Digital literacy of users	9.38%
Other (please explain)	7.98%
Cost of training	7.68%
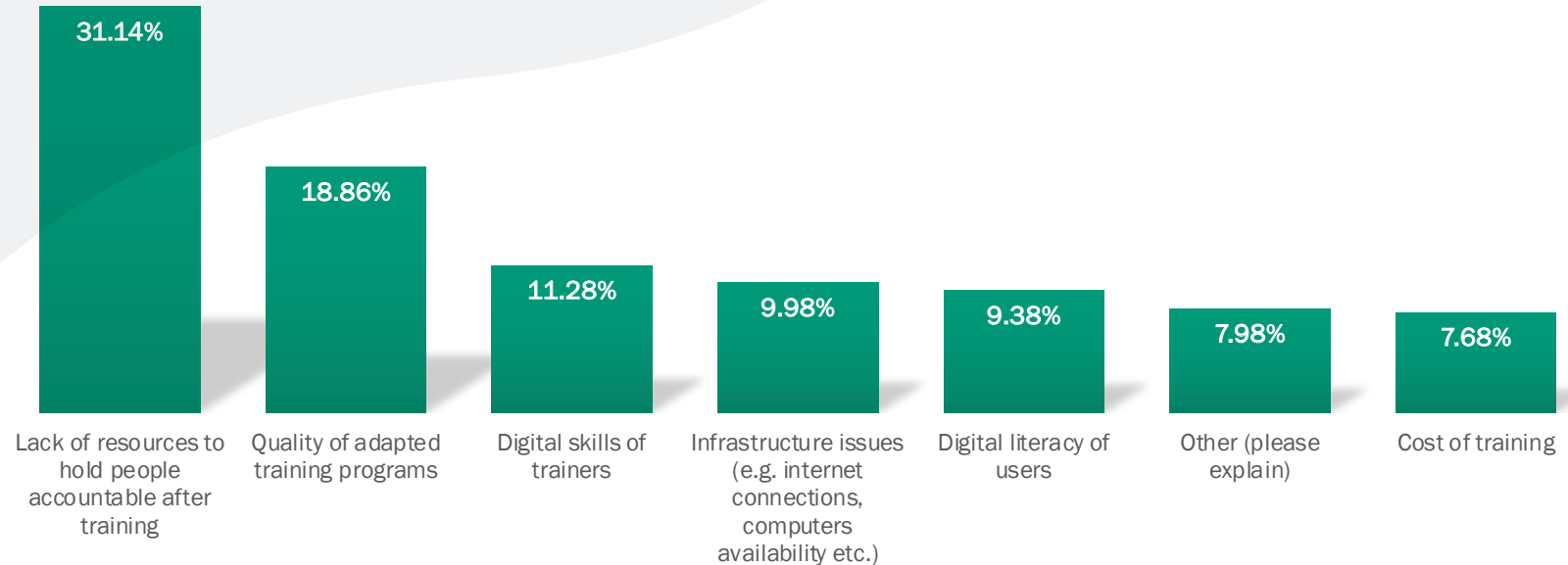
Respondents also identified having resources to hold people accountable, addressing quality issues with their newly adapted training programs, and improving the digital skills of their trainers as key to improving learning and development in their organizations.

"Rethink your technology and how you use it. You might not be able to change the technology infrastructure, but you can certainly get closer to it and understand how to use it more efficiently. It's about getting more out of what you've already invested in by thinking differently about how to use your tools."
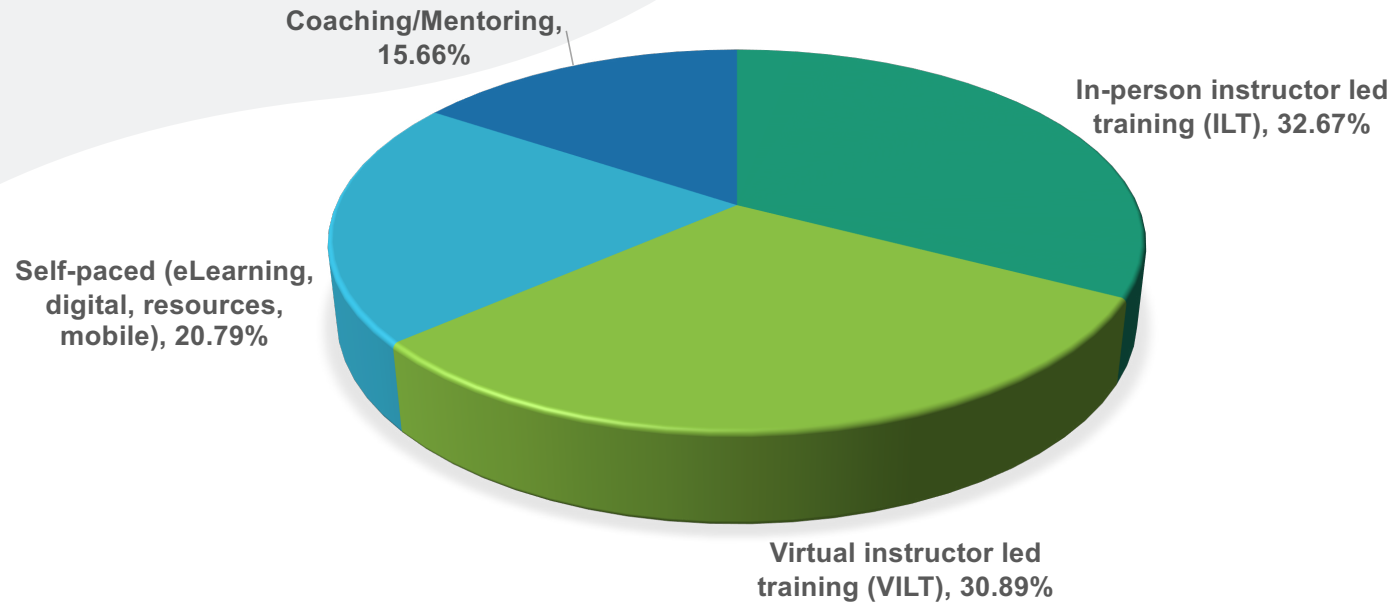
Britney Cole

AVP, solutions architecture and innovation strategy
The Ken Blanchard Companies

COVID Has Set the Stage for L&D Reinvention

Looking Ahead to 2021

In the FUTURE (post COVID-19 when classrooms reopen)
What percentage of your training do you anticipate being delivered via each of the following methods?

Coaching/Mentoring, 15.66%

In-person instructor led training (ILT), 32.67%

Self-paced (eLearning, digital, resources, mobile), 20.79%

Virtual instructor led training (VILT), 30.89%

In looking ahead to the time when face-to-face options become available again, respondents expect to use in-person and virtual instructor-led training equally.

## When do you expect to be able to include face-to-face classroom training as an option in your organization?

|					
13.00%	16.08%	20.59%	13.44%	11.23%	0.99%
Now, or before the end of 2020	April, 2021	July, 2021	October, 2021	Sometime in 2022	Never
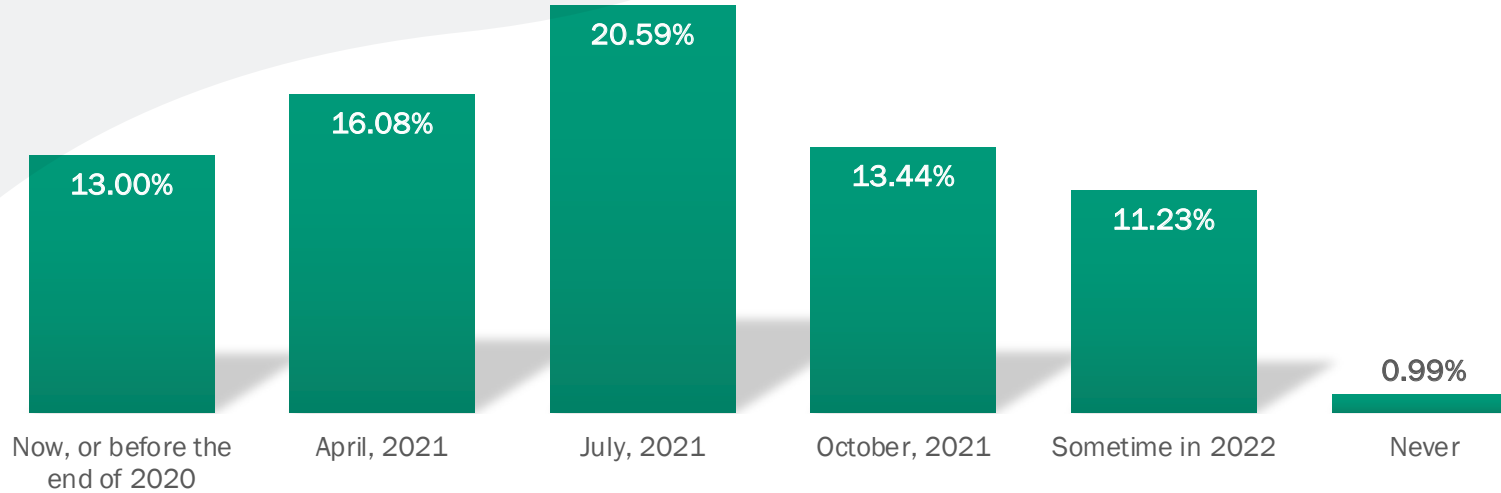
When asked when they believe face-to-face training will return as an option in their organization, July 2021 was the most often cited date.

2021 TRENDS: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN A COVID WORLD

Do you feel that virtual/digital training is appropriate
for every level of employee in your organization?

No, 46%

Yes, 54%
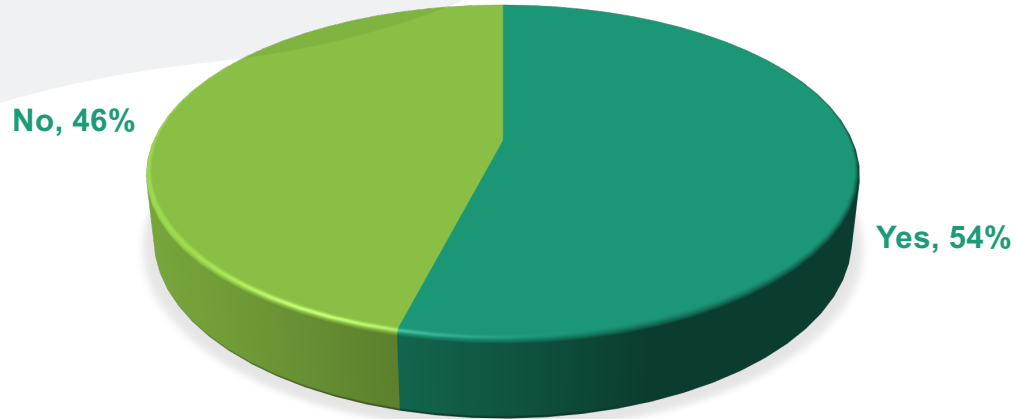
When asked about the appropriateness of virtual/digital training for different levels in their organization, respondents were split, with 54% of respondents saying yes and 46% saying no.

If yes, which levels have you targeted for virtual/digital training?

Executive
16%

Entry-level
27%

Senior-level
24%
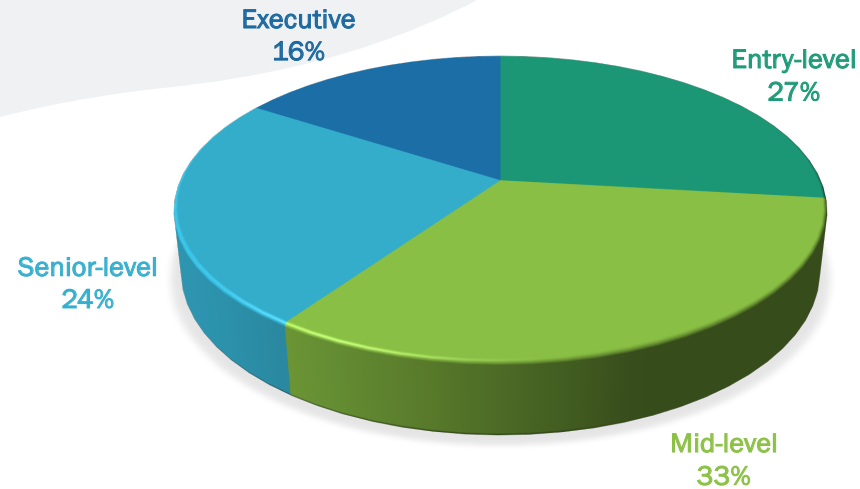
Mid-level
33%

Among respondents who said yes, there was a further distinction that digital and virtual designs were more appropriate for entry-level and mid-level leaders and less appropriate for senior and executive levels of the organization.

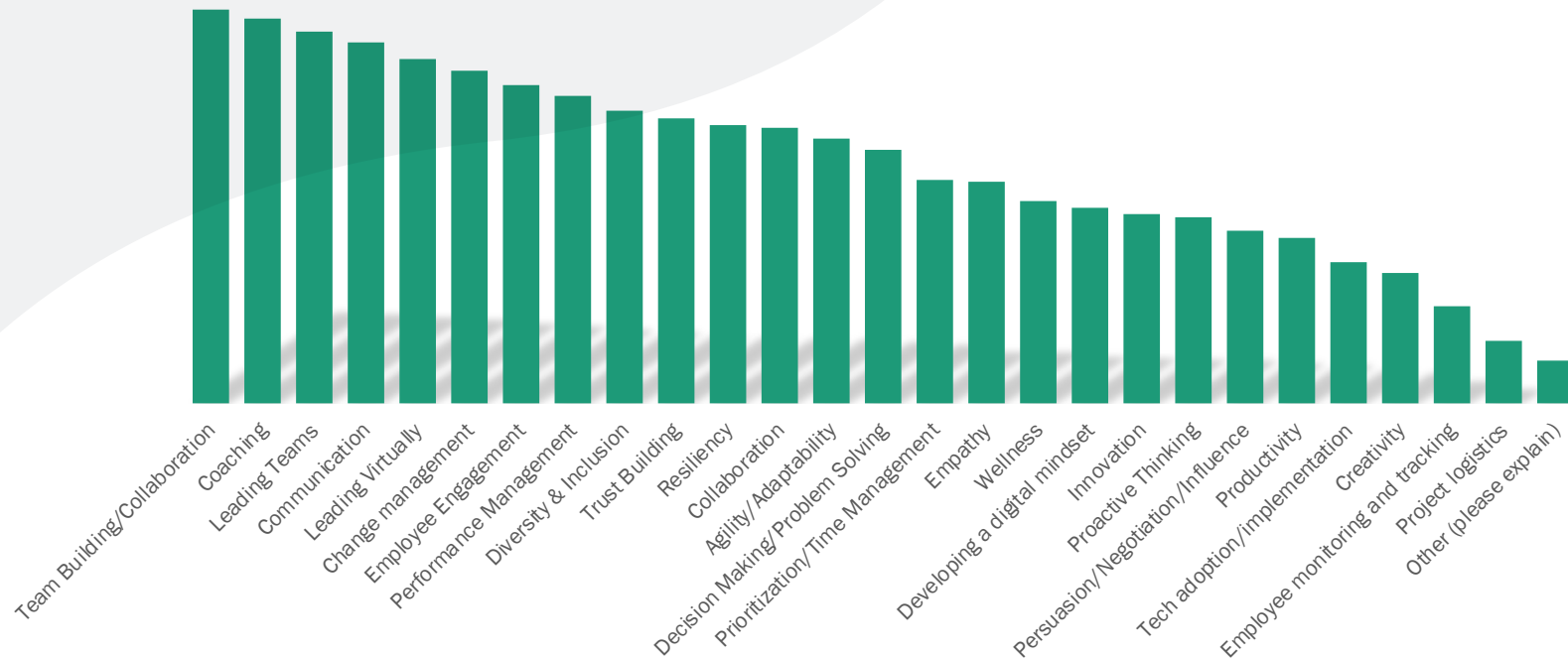Thinking ahead to when you are able to reopen physical classrooms,
Which of the following statements best describes how you will use that option?

Now that we've seen how effective virtual instructor-led training can be, we don't see the need for physical classroom training. 2%

Classroom training is the gold standard and will be our preferred delivery mode when available. 17%

The physical classroom still has a role, but as a part of a blended learning experience. 57%

Classroom training will be used sparingly for high-impact events, with other modalities used for the bulk of our training. 24%

Has COVID spelled the end of face-to-face training? Probably not. But it will be different. A majority of respondents (57%) see face-to-face as having a role, but as a part of a blended learning experience.

What issues will you address with skill training in 2021?
Choose all that apply.

Team Building/Collaboration
Coaching
Leading Teams
Communication
Leading Virtually
Change management
Employee Engagement
Performance Management
Diversity & Inclusion
Trust Building
Resiliency
Collaboration
Agility/Adaptability
Decision Making/Problem Solving
Prioritization/Time Management
Empathy
Wellness
Developing a digital mindset
Innovation
Proactive Thinking
Persuasion/Negotiation/Influence
Productivity
Tech adoption/implementation
Creativity
Employee monitoring and tracking
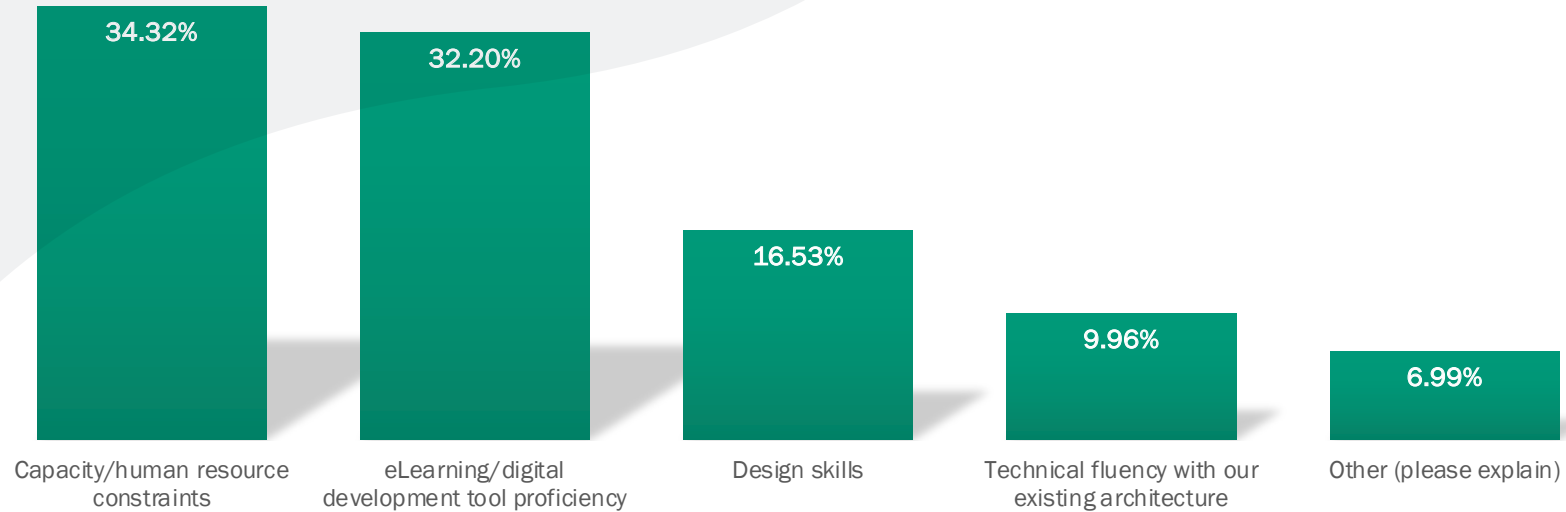Project logistics
Other (please explain)

When asked about the content they will be addressing with all forms of training delivery in 2021, respondents rank ordered 26 different areas to focus on. They identified team building/collaboration, coaching, leading teams, and communication as top priorities followed by leading virtually, change management, and employee engagement.

Do you feel your L&D team has the skills and capacity to deliver
On your organization's expectations in 2021?

No
34%

Yes
66%
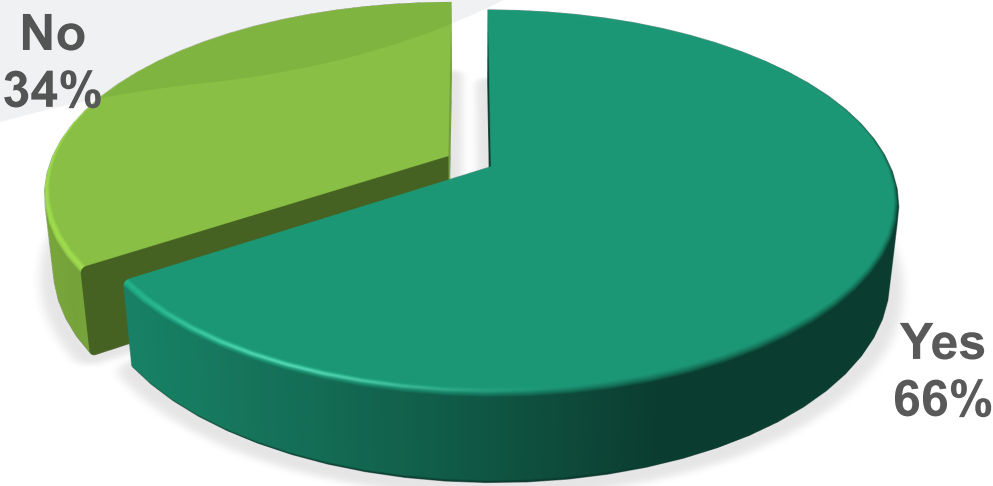
When asked about their team's readiness for 2021, 34% of respondents felt their team would need
additional help to deliver on expectations for the coming year.

Gaps Holding L&D Back

34.32%	32.20%	16.53%	9.96%	6.99%
Capacity/human resource constraints	eLearning/digital development tool proficiency	Design skills	Technical fluency with our existing architecture	Other (please explain)

Lack of capacity/human resource constraints (34%) and inadequate proficiency in eLearning/digital tools (32%) were the two most cited concerns.

This look ahead into the changing L&D landscape shows a need for continued focus on both the content of development programs and the technology platforms used to deliver the learning experience.

"The successful integration of proven content delivered on engaging learning technologies is the key to unlocking the potential of people. There has never been a more demanding time to be in L&D—but it is also a time of great opportunity for those ready to step into this new future."

Scott Blanchard

**President
The Ken Blanchard Companies**

Ready to start developing your people?

For additional resources on ways to successfully address the challenges of developing your people in a changing world, check out the resources available on our solutions page. You'll find ideas and strategies designed to take your content and delivery to the next level.

For more information on specific issues, download these white papers:

High Performance Teams: What it Takes to Make Them Work

Coaching Skills: The Missing Link for Leaders

Building Resilience in Times of Crisis

Contact your Blanchard sales associate or call 760.233.6725
to set up a meeting and discuss how Blanchard can help.

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