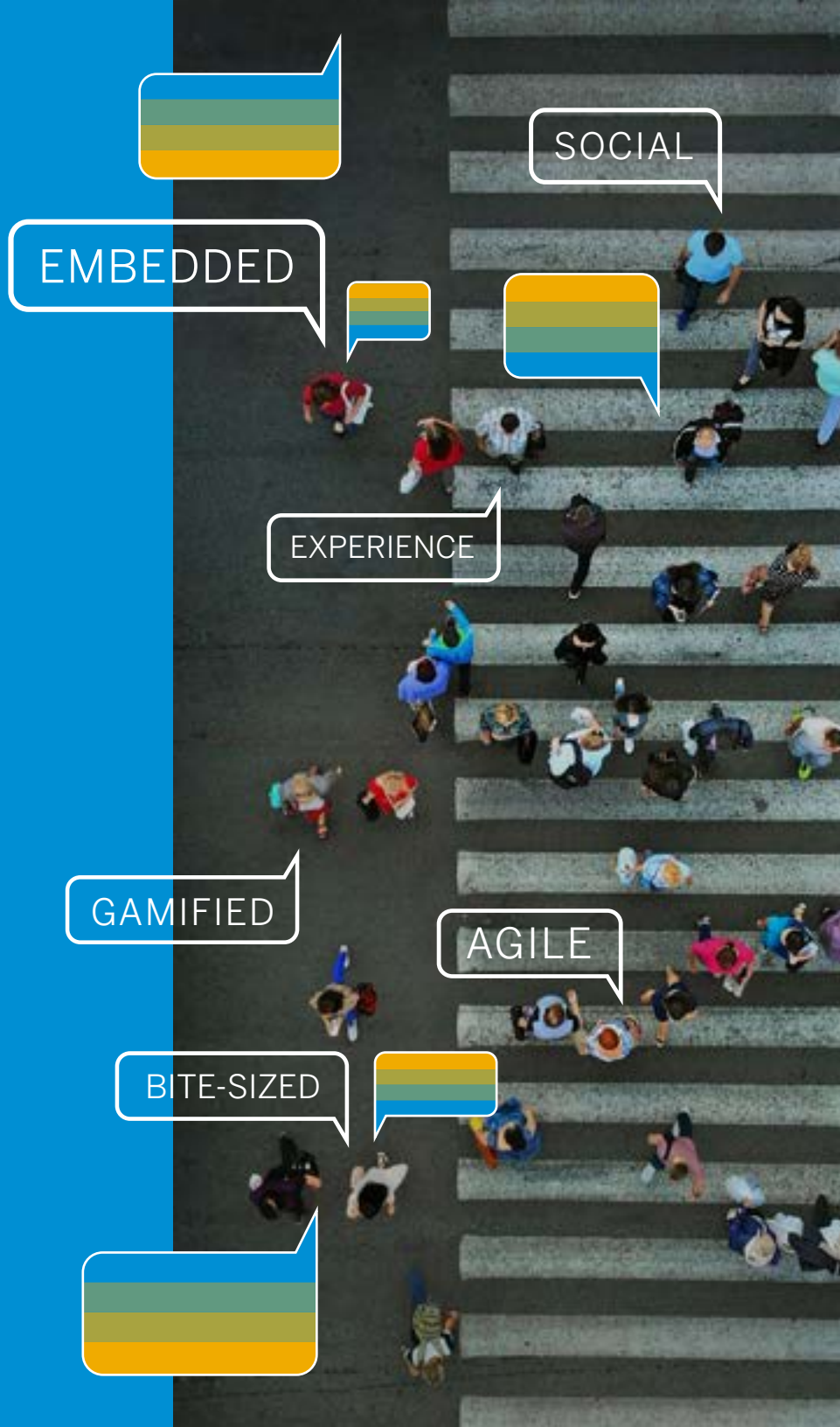
SAP Litmos

Beyond buzzwords: A three-step guide to simplify modern learning



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As an L&D professional, you're more than familiar with the latest buzzwords. Whether building *agile, embedded, bite-sized* courses that are *gamified and social*, or creating *learning journeys enhanced by artificial intelligence* to enrich the ***employee experience***, you have a mouthful of terms with which to describe your training programs. All of these capabilities and concepts may be useful and effective, and at the very least, interesting to talk about, but at the end of the day, what are you really after — beyond the buzzwords?

You
want
results

You want to know that your efforts are improving employee performance. You want to increase customer success, support and enhance the culture, and help reduce risks for the company. You want positive outcomes that align with and drive the goals of the business. That's a modern learning culture at its core! These are very worthy goals and now these outcomes can often be tracked and to some degree of accuracy, measured back to training programs. However, let's pause for a moment to acknowledge that doing so isn't easy. It's not a one-and-done exercise, but rather, a process. And, like any process, it requires steady effort over time. Here are the three steps to simplify modern learning.

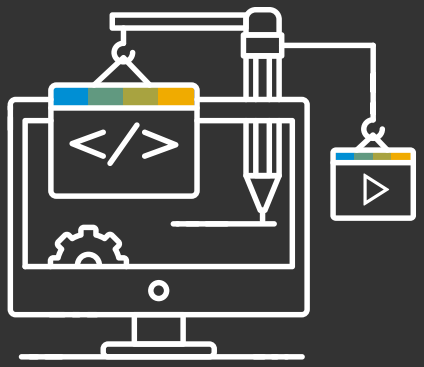
01

Examine your beliefs as a learning professional

Creating a vibrant, modern learning culture is a process. Step one of that process is to step back and examine the status quo. Are there beliefs or practices that have you stuck in a prior time period or in old ways of doing things? Those could potentially hinder your progress, so take a little time to look at your current processes and honestly assess if you think they could be improved or replaced.

No profession or function is immune from stagnation. We all need to regularly question our foundational beliefs to see things from a refreshed perspective. Knowing what works and repeating it is fine and good. No one would ask you to needlessly upset the apple cart; however, there's always room to grow and evolve, and the reality is that new action stems from new thinking.

Before we talk about the things you should do to create a modern learning environment, let's discuss what not to do.

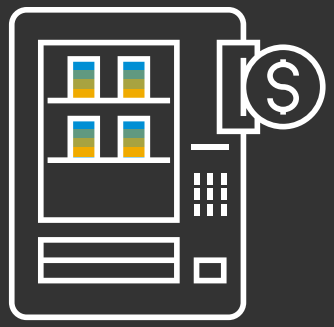


Outdated belief:

If you build it, they will come

This worked wonders on the big screen, but things are not so dreamy in the real world. For the rest of us, we have to get others in the organization to see the value of learning. The stark truth is that nothing sells itself.

Consider the fact that the advertising industry in the US alone tops 200 billion dollars a year. That's pretty telling evidence that people need to be convinced to buy even the best products. Simply put, eyeballs must be earned. So must time and commitment, so start somewhere and begin to plan how you can better align with learners, management, and execs. Sell your story (with honesty and authenticity) and identify allies who want to resell it for you. Move some minds and your work will get easier. Also, remember, there's a reason that you see the same commercials over and over. Most messages require repetition to finally take hold, so don't give up after your first couple attempts!



Outdated belief:

The LMS is your training vending machine

Technology should be leveraged not just to serve up required courses, but also to help you streamline your processes and create an environment that brings learners together and facilitates their professional improvement. Use your learning programs to provide opportunity and develop skills, even outside of someone's existing role. Nurture your people to expand. A key part of creating this culture is also to recognize achievement and request feedback. Let's do away with the vending machine mentality and begin to reframe learning relationships as two-way streets -- or even better, as multidirectional, social conversations.

Outdated belief:

Set it and forget it

L&D is not the type of role where you launch a project, cross your fingers, and walk away. Instead, you need to repeatedly create momentum and then work to maintain it. It's true that many of the administrative functions within the LMS can be automated, such as assigning courses and setting reminders, but to keep the engagement rolling, it takes a bit of effort.

One way to create ongoing engagement and excitement is to identify new leaders and involve them. Consider asking them to suggest new courses or even lead a training. Don't be afraid to include other people in your learning campaigns. (Yes, campaigns. Remember, nothing sells itself). You may be surprised at how momentum can swell simply by shifting to a community mindset. Time to throw off the cloak of the lone wolf. People naturally like to be a part of something, so use that collective energy to generate participation and commitment.

02

Assess who your learners are and what they expect

Their expectations have changed – even in the last five or so years. For starters, they're actively seeking more learning. They expect to be able to "pull" it, meaning that they can access a wide range of courses on demand, rather than only doing required "push" courses. People want to design their own destiny and create custom learning paths that propel their careers and spark their interests.

In fact, ADP research shows [2] that 65% of employees report wanting as much training as possible to help them achieve their career goals. Not only do they not see it as a burden, today's workforce places a great deal of value on learning. It's time to meet learners where they are. This is a positive and exciting change, one that challenges L&D professionals to rise to the occasion and provide the education that modern learners want, in the ways that they want it.

Modern learners must adapt and learn new skills faster than any time in history.

According to the US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average time in a single job is now only about four years. That number shrinks to about two years or less [2] in the top ten tech companies. People are reinventing themselves more frequently than generations before and, according to the statistics, will have to do so many times in the course of their careers.

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Plus, modern learners want to be untethered from the office and the desk. They want to train from any device at any time. This isn't new news, of course. We all know that it's a mobile-first, remote, globally dispersed world, and learners are demanding training be available at their fingertips from anywhere.

Changing workforce demographics also add to the shape of the modern learning landscape. Research shows [3] that millennials (anyone born between 1981 and 1996) will comprise 75 percent of the workforce by 2025. This means developing training that appeals to and engages people who may have grown up with an IBM PC (1981) or the first Apple Macintosh (1984) in the house. They likely consumed a steady diet of Nintendo and MTV, too, which is why gamification and video should certainly be in your training playbook, if they're not already.

What action to take now?

Your L&D job matters more than ever in driving the goals of the business. The next challenge to address is conveying some of what you know to the rest of the organization. That's key to building a modern learning culture.

As part of doing this, you can work with team leads to set some baselines for what you plan to measure, whether team and/or individual performance goals, and skill sets that support larger company goals. The reporting functions in your LMS will be your most valuable tool for measuring the outcomes that matter to your organization. Again, be sure to get key stakeholder buy-in on what you're tracking and why. A modern learning culture requires a new dedication to reporting and analysis.

Four tips to share the value and importance of training:

Put your sales hat on

to become the champion of your own programs. Commit to "selling" the value of training as a competitive advantage.

Meet with managers

to discuss the importance of leading by example and buying into the training vision. Without their support you're fighting an uphill battle.

Enlist leaders

to get more involved in championing the learning culture and the budget it requires for success.

Promote the value

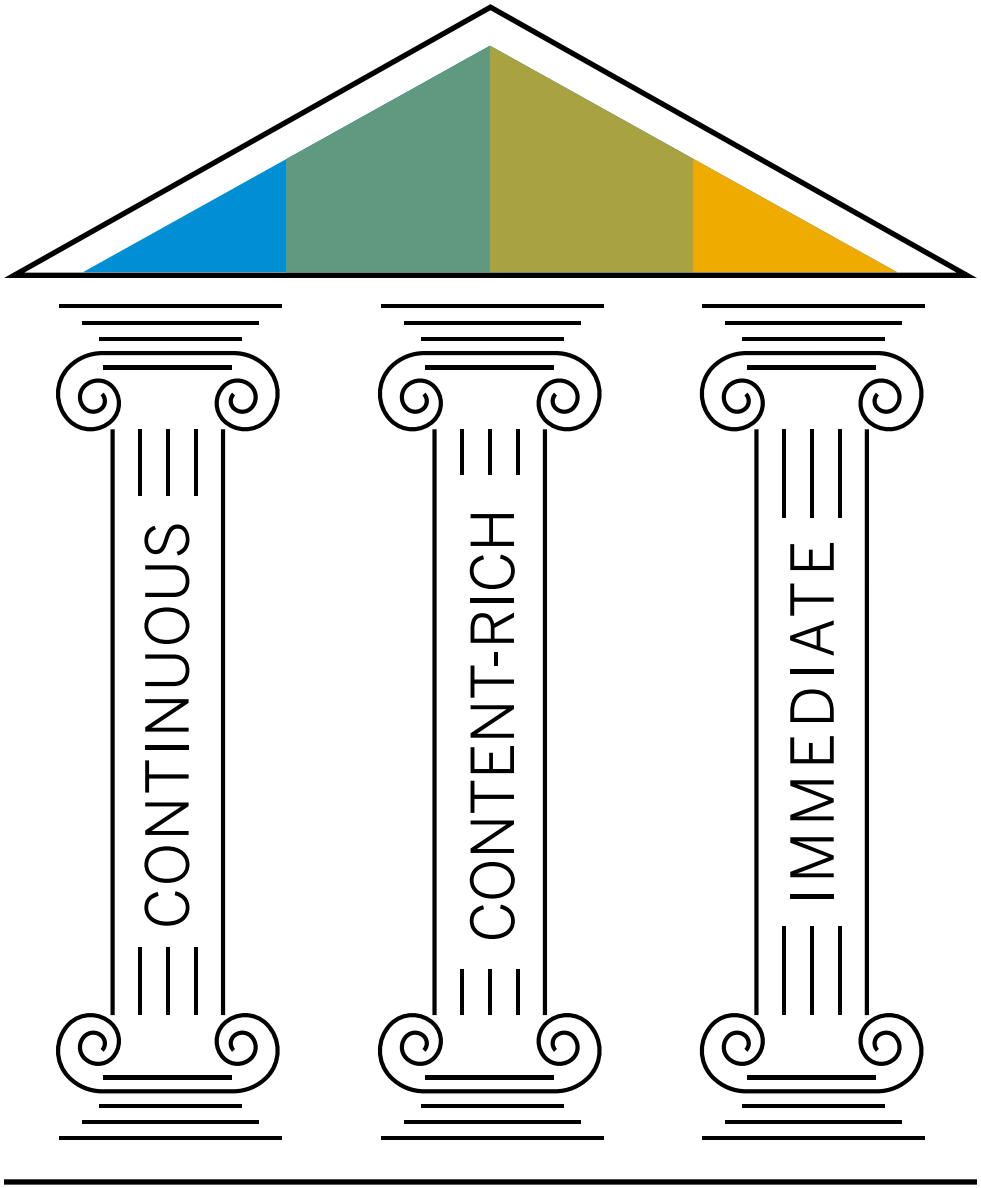
to individual contributors and sell it up. A trickle-up approach can earn key advocates from within.

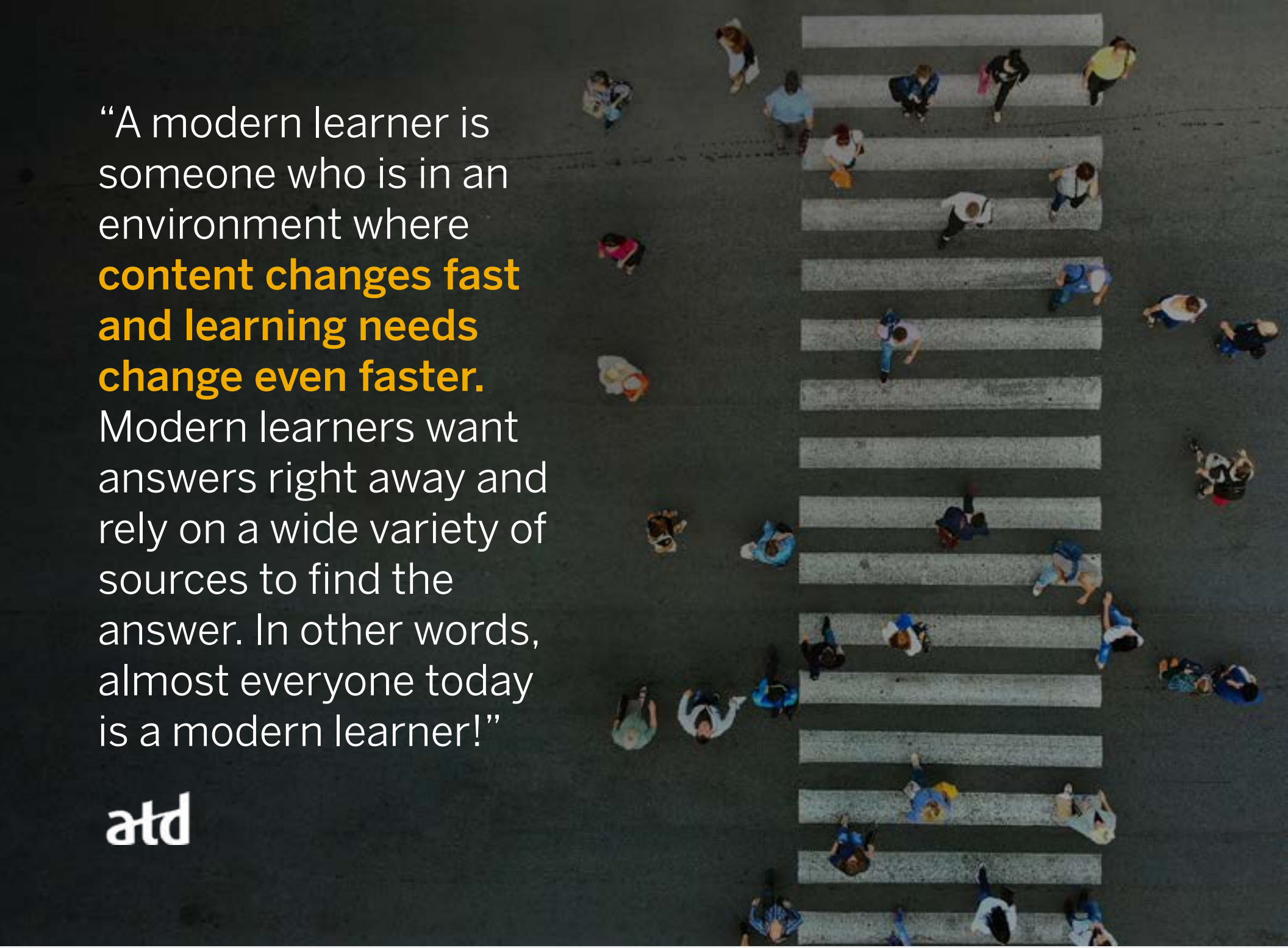
03

Build the three pillars of modern learning

As discussed in the introduction, your commitment to building a modern learning culture means being able to reasonably prove that your efforts drive outcomes like better employee performance, more consistent customer success, a more energized culture, and reduced risks for the company. You want to align learning with the goals of the business.

Regardless of what types of courses you create and deliver, regardless of what LMS you use, and regardless of what devices your learners prefer, there are at least three pillars that must be in place to support a modern learning culture – and meet the needs of today's workforce.





"A modern learner is someone who is in an environment where **content changes fast and learning needs change even faster.** Modern learners want answers right away and rely on a wide variety of sources to find the answer. In other words, almost everyone today is a modern learner!"

atd

Continuous

Delivering on the promise of ongoing learning is more attainable than ever because we have the technology to make it possible (and possibly even easy). We can integrate the LMS with other platforms to weave learning into people's day-to-day workflows. Training no longer requires breaking away from your "real focus" to develop an isolated skill. Now, it can be experienced within the parameters of a job function, while still expanding expertise in that very function.

Continuous learning is also simply a sign of the times. Technology has pushed the pace of business to unprecedented speeds. Professionals in any role and in any industry can attest to needing to know more new things faster than ever. If people don't continuously learn, their skills become stale (or worse, obsolete) at an unprecedented rate. Further still, when people stop learning, motivation can significantly decrease. L&D departments need to keep teams equipped to meet these changing requirements and to prepare people for ongoing success.

Content-rich

A variety of technologies now make it not only possible, but easy, to offer engaging off-the-shelf content that you didn't create yourself. Why reinvent the wheel developing courses on common topics like policy and compliance, customer service, sales mastery, leadership and management, and many others? You can purchase professionally developed, video-based content that covers your bases without wasting a second attempting to animate a single graphic.

What's more, utilizing prebuilt content frees you up to work on the proprietary stuff. Inevitably, every organization will have some amount of company-specific training that must be created in-house. The key point, however, is that a modern learning culture should shift the balance away from creating and more toward curating. It's putting yourself and your learners at a disadvantage to try to shoulder the entire content burden without third-party help.

Immediate

While traditional L&D models pushed courses to people and required them to be completed within an assigned timeframe, today's learners are taking control of their own development. They're reaching out for new information on a daily basis. We've all become accustomed to (and quite enamored with) a "search engine mindset." When we want answers, we want them now. There's no turning back on this reality. L&D departments must throw out old ideas about only making information available as it's ready to be "pushed." The new norm is to provide access to a rich library of on-demand content.

Modernize and thrive.

With these three steps, you've got an outline for building a powerful modern learning program that has measurable impact on your organization. While it may be challenging and perhaps humbling to examine your beliefs and practices, doing so can reinvigorate your creativity and inspire more effective programs. Similarly, assessing your learners' needs and expectations is a worthwhile exercise to close the gap between what your team currently produces and what your workforce actually needs for greater engagement and success. Lastly, insisting that your programs are continuous, content-rich, and immediate will earn you the mark of a modern learning culture. In the end, following these steps can help you manifest many of the results you seek, not the least of which is empowering modern learners to thrive in the face of the unmatched demands of the modern workplace.

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https://www.adp.com/spark.aspx

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3. The (Millennial) Workplace of the Future Is Almost Here –
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4. Are You a Modern Learner?
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