

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY STUDY

**Carpe Diem: Seizing
the Opportunity to Build
an Agile Organization**

*The Impact of Leadership, Culture and Technology
on Organizational Agility through Learning*

Executive Summary

Introduction to the Research

According to CLO research conducted in 2012, learning leaders identified *helping to build an agile workforce to quickly adapt to change* as the No. 1 area of opportunity for L&D to make a business impact. Forty-five percent of learning leaders said they saw an opportunity for learning organizations to make a business impact through increasing organizational agility. To delve deeper into how the learning function can help to increase organizational agility, the Human Capital Media (HCM) Advisory Group and Saba Inc. partnered to conduct research into what the key attributes of an agile organization are and how the learning function can maximize its impact on organizational agility. We structured the research to address the following questions:

- Which practices of the learning function help to build an agile organization that quickly adapts to change?
- What current barriers stand in the way of increasing organizational agility through learning?
- How do learning leaders understand the intersection of learning and organizational agility?
- What learning technologies best promote and foster organizational agility?
- What learning metrics are key to measuring organizational agility?
- What do the best learning organizations do to foster agility in the organization?

Research Methods

- A 52 item survey was sent to learning leaders at director level and above.
- 557 responses were received.
- Respondents were from a broad spectrum of industries, company sizes and geographic distributions.

Key Findings

- Knowledge management and leadership development are the most common strategies for increasing organizational agility through learning.
- The obstacles to L&D helping to increase organizational agility are primarily culture issues (organizational silos, resistance to change, conflicting goals of different departments).
- Strategic enablers are more focused on connecting people to people and content through knowledge management and *social technologies*, while other organizations are catching up in the implementation of knowledge management systems.
- Strategic enablers focus on changing the learning culture through leadership development while cost centers focus on change management. The most dramatic differences between strategic enablers and cost centers involve practices related to learning culture.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary..... 2

 Introduction to the Research..... 2

 Research Methods..... 2

 Key Findings 2

How the Research Is Structured 4

 Strategic Enablers 4

 Four Hypotheses 5

 View From the C-Suite 5

Knowledge Management..... 8

Change Management..... 10

Leadership Development..... 12

Culture of Learning 14

Obstacles to Increasing Organizational Agility..... 16

Agility and Learning Technologies 17

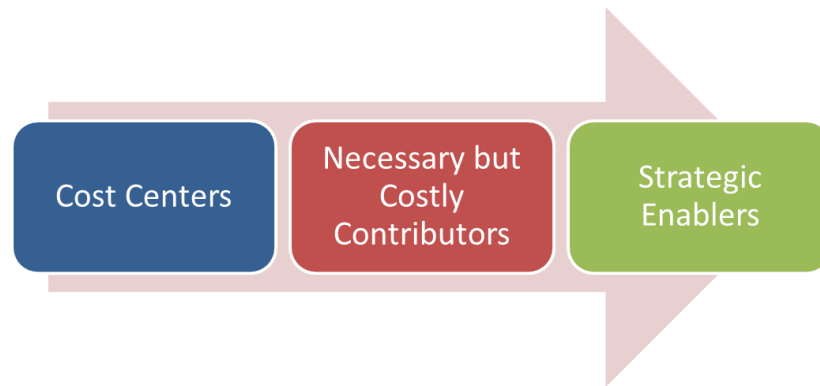
Measuring the L&D Contribution to Agility 20

Contact Information..... 21

How the Research Is Structured

Strategic Enablers

As a learning organization increases its alignment with the business, it moves from being perceived as a cost center to being perceived as a strategic enabler for the business.



From the 2012 State of the Industry Study on Learning Alignment [“Transforming Learning Into a Strategic Business Enabler: What Does It Mean for Learning to Be a Strategic Enabler for the Business?” HCM Advisory Group. Sponsored by Saba], we know that learning organizations that are perceived as strategic enablers are:

- Twenty-five to 42 percent more likely to report that training is aligned with the business strategy.
- Twice as likely to use objective measures of employee performance to align their learning to the business strategy.
- Twice as likely to do formal learning requirements planning.
- Four times more likely to have a learning advisory board with members from the business and the learning function.
- Twenty-six to 43 percent more likely to have an annual process of mapping the learning strategy to the business strategy for the year.
- Thirty-nine percent more likely to have been demonstrating the impact that training has on the business.

We also know that when you ask a random sample of learning leaders whether their learning organization is perceived as a strategic enabler, a necessary but costly contributor or a cost center, they tend to come out in these percentages:

- 50 percent strategic enablers.
- 35 percent costly contributors.
- 15 percent cost centers.

This makes organizations that say they are perceived as strategic enablers the top 50 percent. Throughout this research paper, we will be comparing the data provided by strategic enablers with the

data provided by costly contributors and cost centers. This allows us to see what practices are in use among the leading learning organizations and what differences there may be in these practices with learning organizations that are lagging.

Four Hypotheses

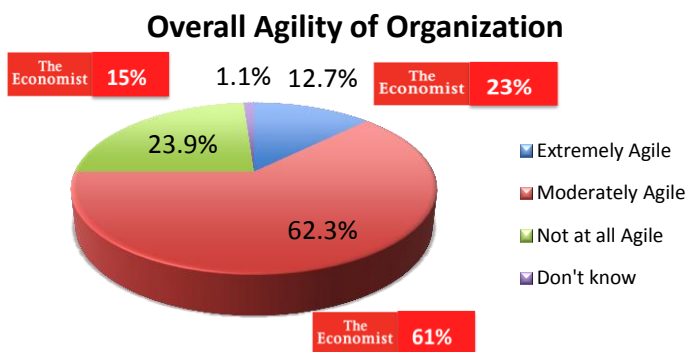
We began this research project with four hypotheses about how the learning function may be helping to increase organizational agility, and designed the survey to gather data about how important these factors are thought to be in increasing organizational agility, how widely they are in use, what plans are in place to utilize them in the future and to what extent they are considered impactful for increasing organizational agility.

The research tests the following four hypotheses. The learning function increases organizational agility through:

- Facilitating knowledge sharing: connecting people to content, people to people and through analytics (helping people to quickly analyze the value of content).
- Employing change management: teaching standardized processes, communicating a clear vision, reskilling employees to hot new skill sets, increasing adaptability and decreasing resistance to change.
- Leadership development: teaching leaders to be flexible and adaptable, and teaching innovative thinking.
- Creating a culture of continuous learning: incentives for learning, learning attached to the performance measurement process, processes of continuous improvement, investing in high-potential people.

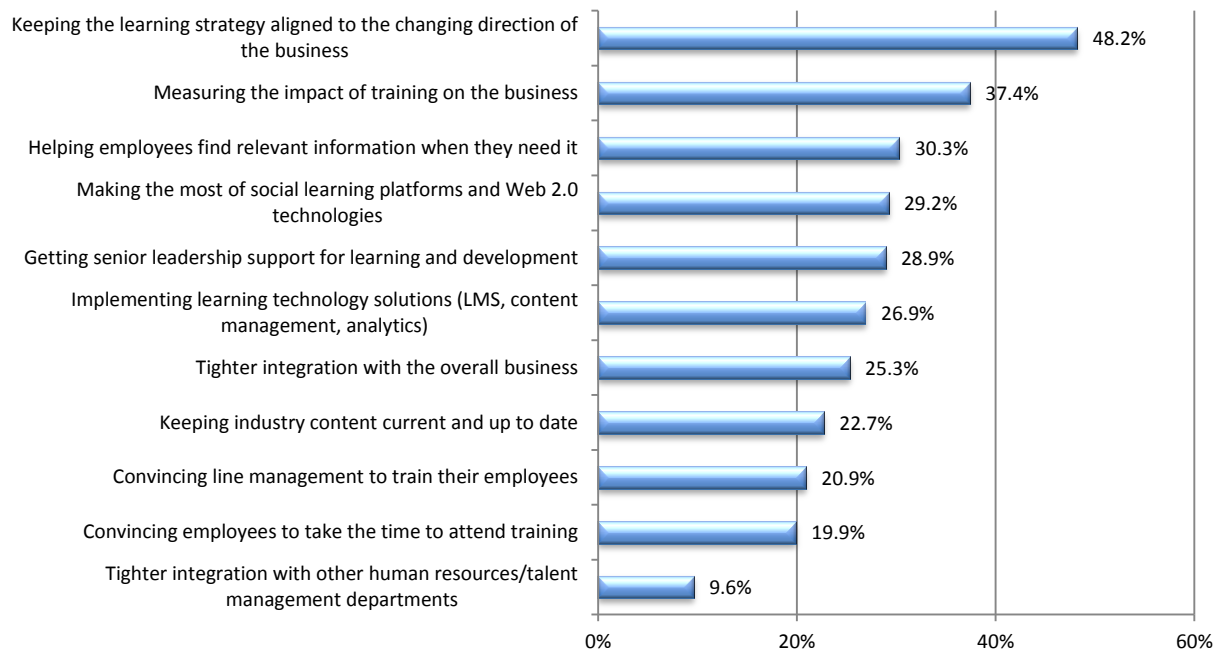
View From the C-suite

Learning leaders think their organizations are less agile than their C-suite counterparts do. We compared results from the learning leaders we surveyed to an Economist study on organizational agility of C-suite executives. [“Organisational Agility: How Business Can Survive and Thrive in Turbulent Times.” The Economist Intelligence Unit. Sponsored by EMC. March 2009.]

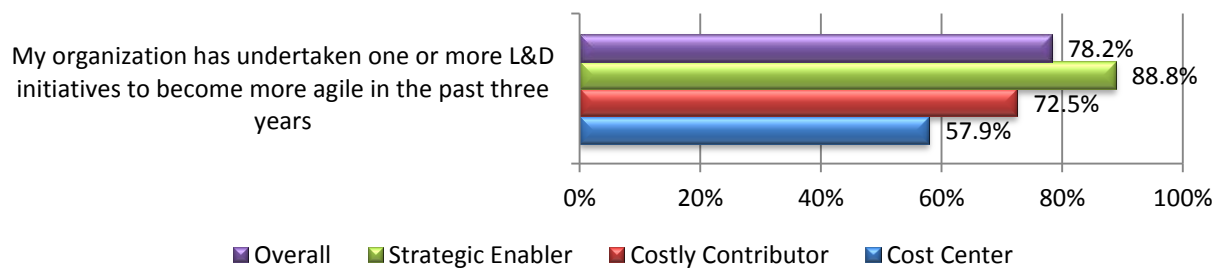


Learning leaders are more likely to say agility is extremely important for their organization’s overall business success than the C-suite leaders are. Learning executives at 51.5 of companies say agility is extremely important for their organization’s overall business success — that agility is a core differentiator. In the economist study, only 40 percent of C-suite respondents said agility was extremely important to overall business success. We also asked learning executives how important they believe the learning function is to increasing organizational agility. The learning function is extremely important for increasing organizational agility to 65.4 percent. An additional 30.8 percent believe the learning function is somewhat important for increasing organizational agility.

Key Learning Challenges for the Next Three Years



We asked learning leaders what they saw as their key learning challenges for the next three years. They report the No. 1 challenge is keeping the learning strategy aligned to the changing direction of the business, followed by measuring the impact of training on the business and helping employees find relevant information when they need it.

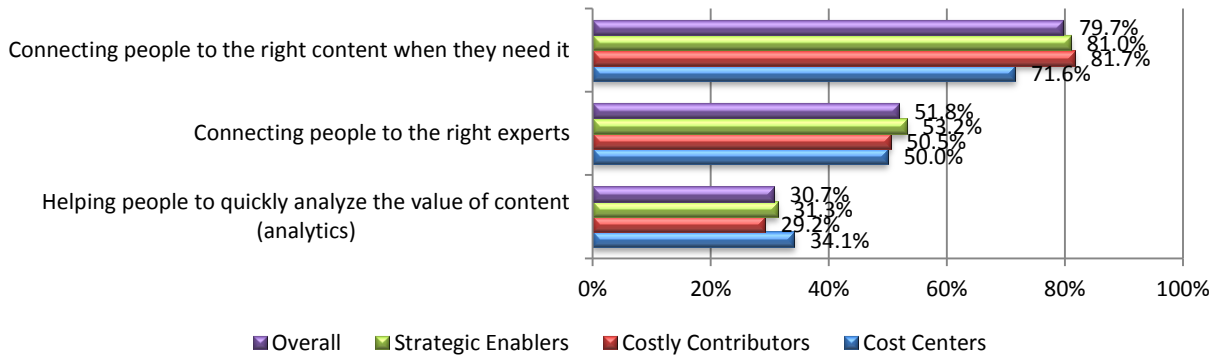


Learning leaders were asked whether they had undertaken one or more learning and development initiatives to increase organizational agility in the past three years, and 78.2 percent said that they had. Interestingly, learning organizations that were strategic enablers for the business were significantly more likely to have undertaken L&D initiatives to increase organizational agility. Of strategic enablers, 88.8 percent reported they had undertaken an initiative to increase agility, where only 57.9 percent of learning organizations seen as cost centers had done so.

Knowledge Management

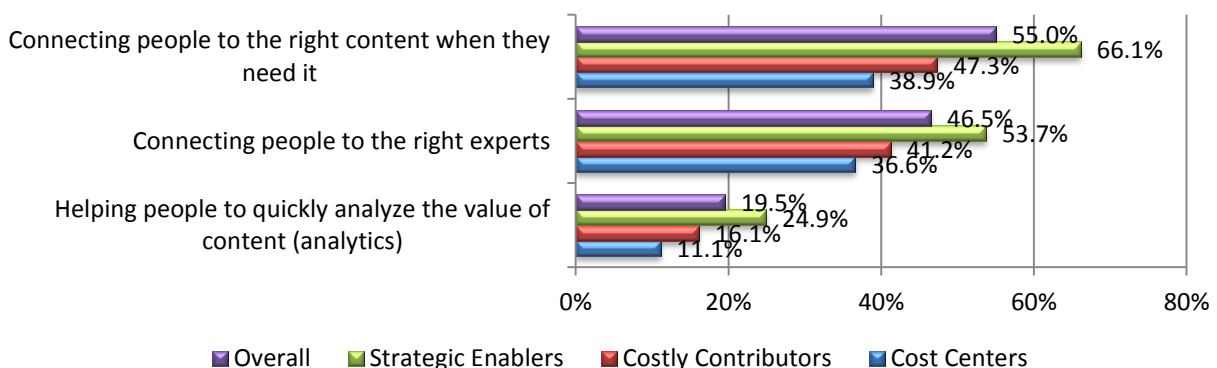
In our survey of learning leaders, connecting people to the right content is the No. 1 answer for what learning leaders see as important for increasing organizational agility. Of all respondents, 79.7 percent said they believe connecting people to the right content is of key importance for increasing organizational agility. In addition, more than half of respondents (51.8 percent) said they believe connecting people to the right experts was of key importance for increasing agility.

Is Knowledge Management Important for Increasing Organizational Agility?



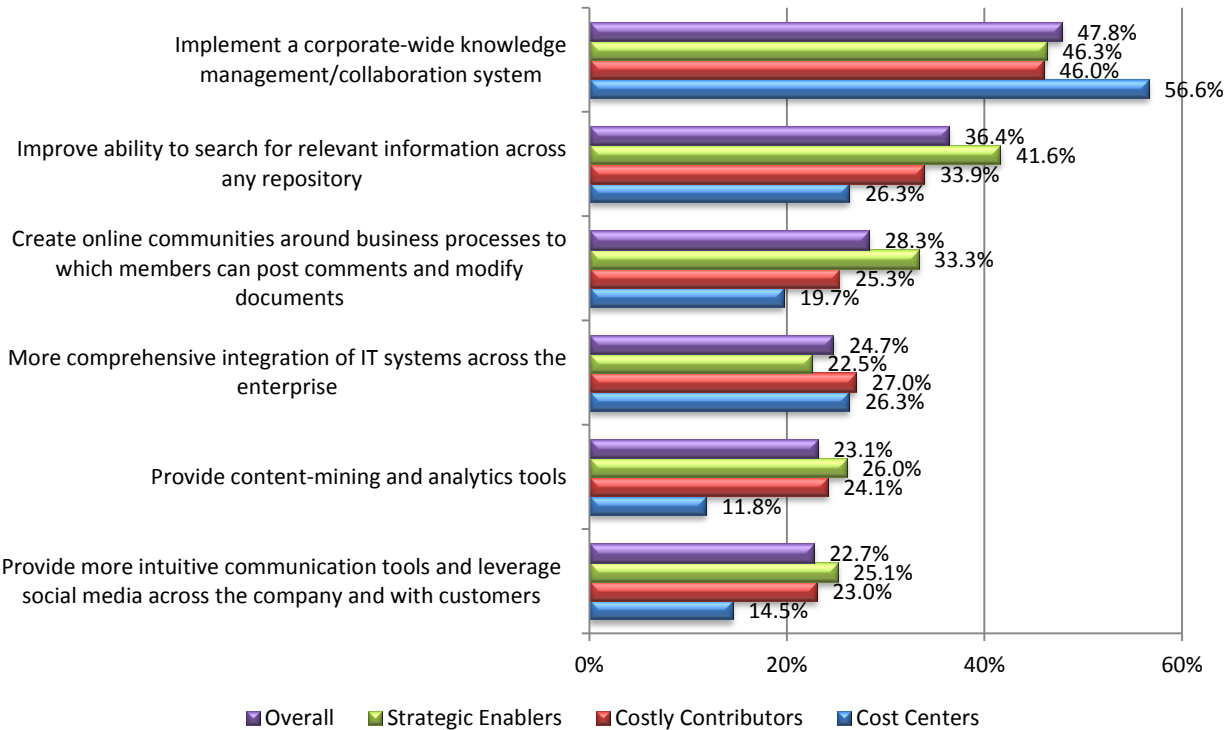
Using knowledge management, particularly connecting people to content, is a strategy that the top learning organizations report they have already been using, and where the cost centers are catching up. Strategic enablers are 27.2 percent more likely than other organizations to say they connect people to the right content to increase organizational agility. Strategic enablers are also more likely to connect people to the right experts and help people quickly analyze the value of content to impact organizational agility, though these strategies are used less often than connecting people to the right content.

Is Knowledge Management Used Now to Increase Agility?



The use of knowledge management (KM) technologies is a top answer for effective L&D impact on agility. Implementing a corporate-wide knowledge management system is the No. 2 answer to the question of how L&D can best help to increase organizational agility. Interestingly, cost centers are more likely to view knowledge management technologies as a key way for L&D to increase agility, which may reflect that, while strategic enablers have been using these technologies for some time, cost centers are focusing on KM technology implementations to “catch up” to where the leaders in the industry have been. This becomes even more interesting when we look at the differences in emerging social technologies and analytics tools, where strategic enablers are significantly more likely to say that these are key ways for the learning function to help increase organizational agility.

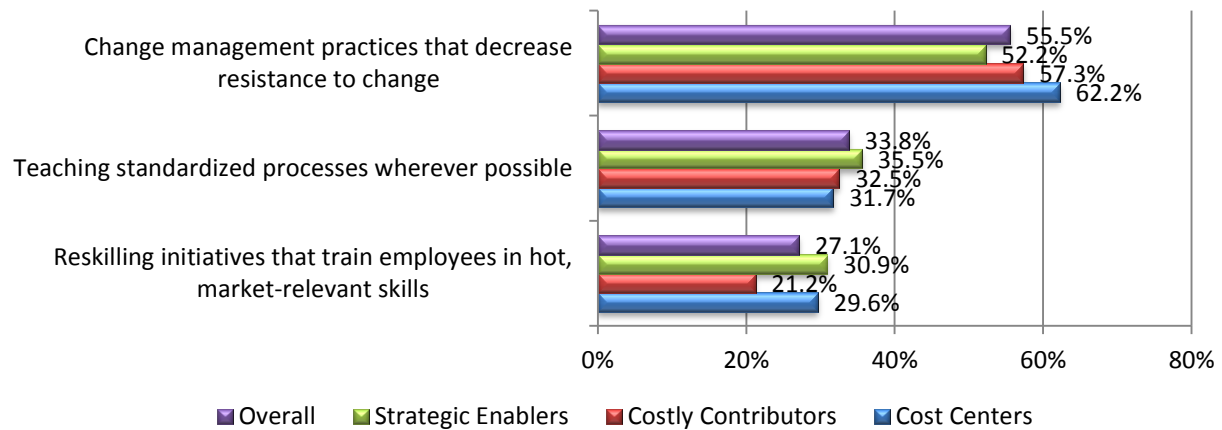
How Can L&D Best Help to Increase Agility? Knowledge Management Items



Change Management

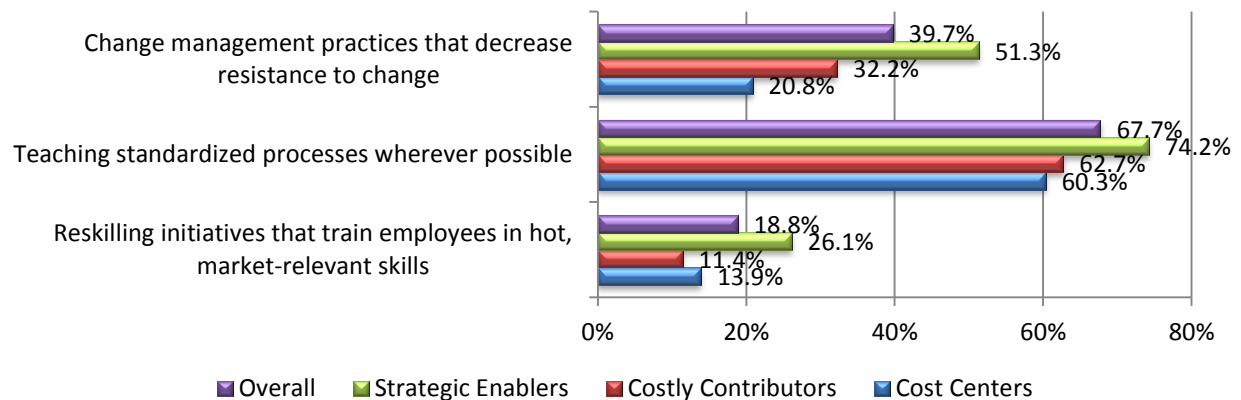
Overall, the results about change management indicate that it is not seen as being as critical to increasing agility as other factors, such as leadership development, knowledge management and learning culture. However, 55.5 percent of respondents say that they think change management is important for increasing agility, and teaching standardized practices wherever possible (a key practice of change management) is the No. 1 practice used today to increase agility, though only 33.8 percent of respondents think that teaching standardized practices is a key way for L&D to increase organizational agility.

Is Change Management Important for Increasing Organizational Agility?



Also of interest, change management is the only strategy more likely to be seen as important by cost centers, rather than strategic enablers. Ironically, strategic enablers are more likely to *use* change management, while cost centers are more likely to think it's *important* to use it.

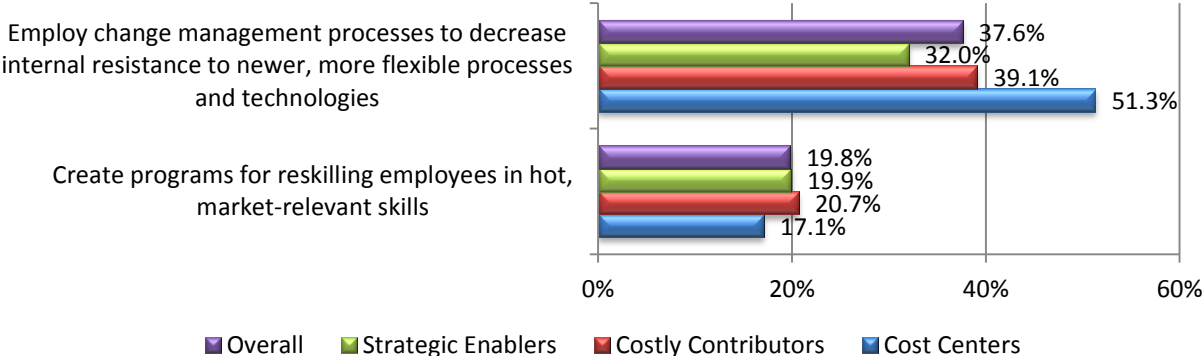
Is Change Management Used Now to Increase Agility?



When we asked respondents how learning and development can best help to increase organizational agility, again, cost centers were 19.3 percent more likely to see change management as an asset than

strategic enablers were. This may be a reflection on the context of learning organizations that are viewed as cost centers, and the obstacles they face internally to effective deployment of learning and development. As we will discuss later, cost centers are likely to have more internal obstacles to using L&D to increase organizational agility, and those obstacles are primarily related to organizational culture.

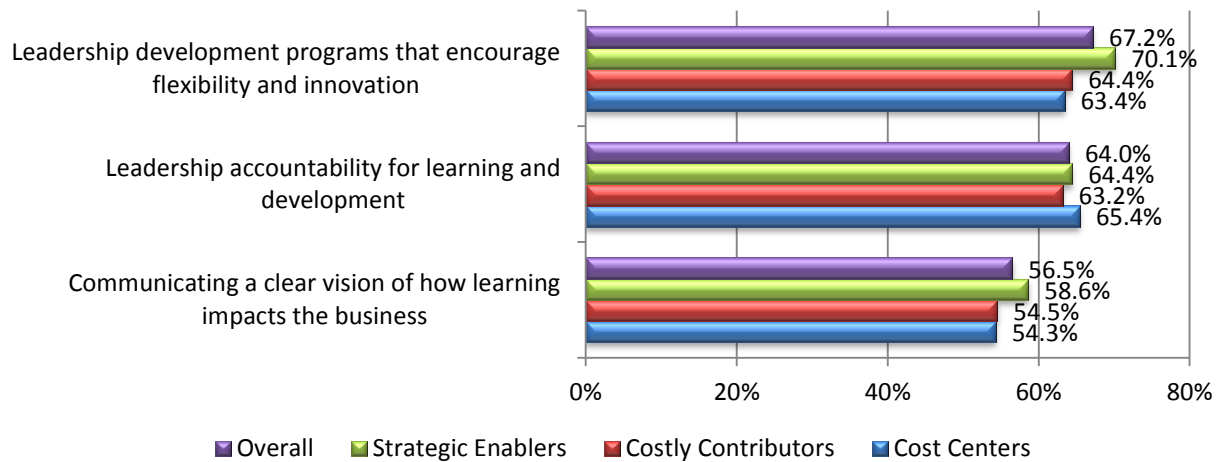
How Can L&D Best Help to Increase Agility? Change Management Items



Leadership Development

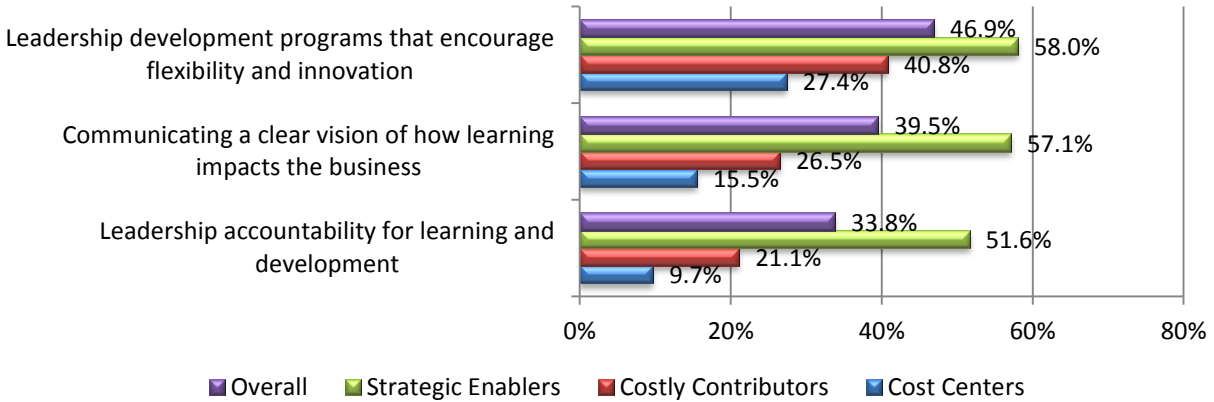
Leadership development is seen by all organizations as being of key importance for helping to increase organizational agility. From open comments provided by our research participants it emerged that learning leaders believe that their organization’s leadership is key to cultivating and fostering an agile *environment*, and that to increase organizational agility it is necessary for leaders to model that behavior for other employees in the organization. Learning leaders also explained that much of their measurement efforts for the learning function aim to increase leadership involvement and support of learning programs, which they consider vital for increasing organizational agility.

Is Leadership Development Important for Increasing Agility?



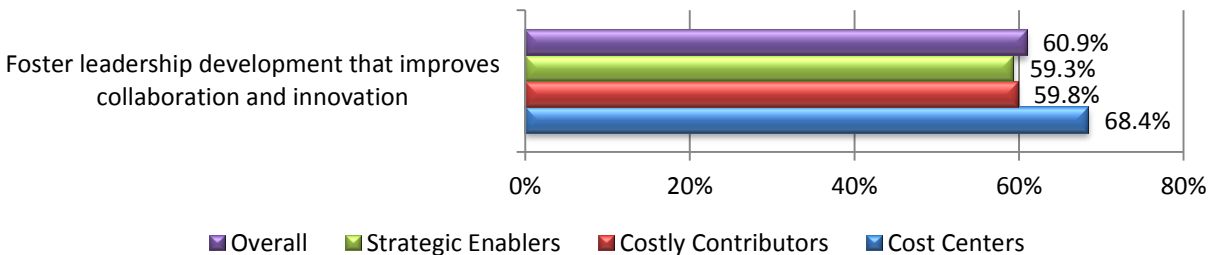
In practice, leadership development and leadership accountability for learning and development is used much more often by strategic enablers. Strategic enablers are 30.6 percent more likely than cost centers to use leadership development programs to increase organizational agility. They are also 41.6 percent more likely to clearly communicate the vision of how learning and development impacts the organization. Finally, strategic enablers are 41.9 percent more likely to say that they use leadership accountability for learning and development to drive organizational agility efforts.

Is Leadership Development Used Now to Increase Agility?



When we asked learning leaders how learning and development can best help to increase organizational agility, fostering leadership development that improves collaboration and innovation was the No. 1 answer by more than 13 percentage points. The next two most common answers to how L&D can best help to increase organizational agility are both about knowledge management: implementing a corporate-wide knowledge management system and improving the ability to search for relevant information across any repository. Intriguingly, though all three alignment maturity groups see leadership development as the most important way for learning and development to increase organizational agility, cost centers are even more likely than strategic enablers to think so, which may be a reflection on the challenges they face in convincing leadership to support learning.

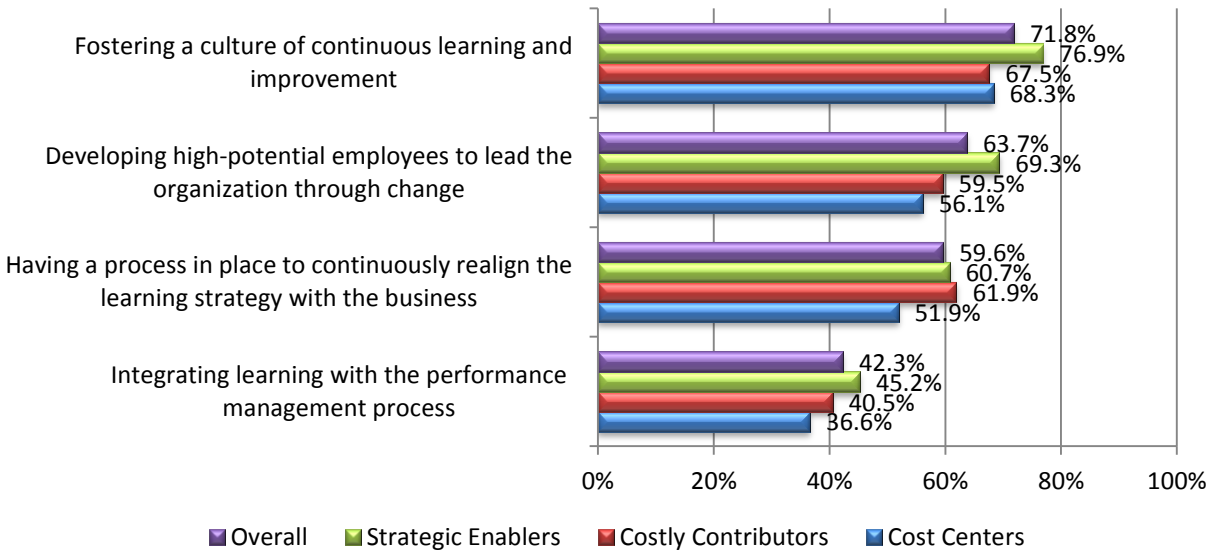
How Can L&D Best Help to Increase Agility? Leadership Development Item



Culture of Learning

Fostering a culture of continuous learning was the second most important L&D practice for increasing agility for learning leaders. Strategic enablers are more likely to see fostering a learning culture as important to increasing agility, but not by a wide margin, indicating that there is widespread agreement across learning organizations that the culture of learning is of key importance to making an impact on organizational agility.

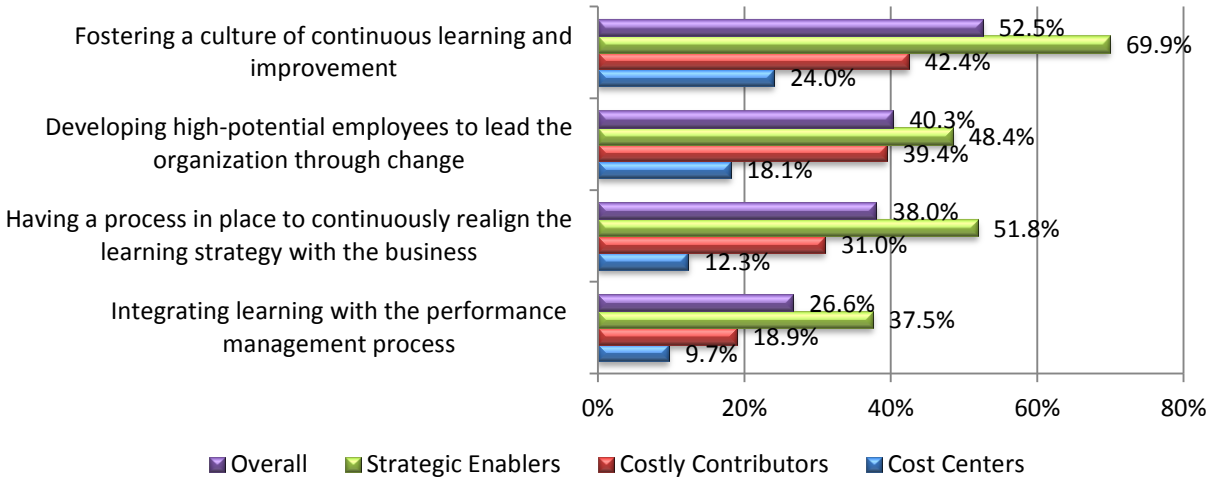
Is Learning Culture Important to Increasing Organizational Agility?



The questions on learning culture represent the largest differences in actual practices between strategic enablers and other organizations. Strategic enablers are very significantly more likely to engage in fostering a culture of continuous learning. Strategic enablers are:

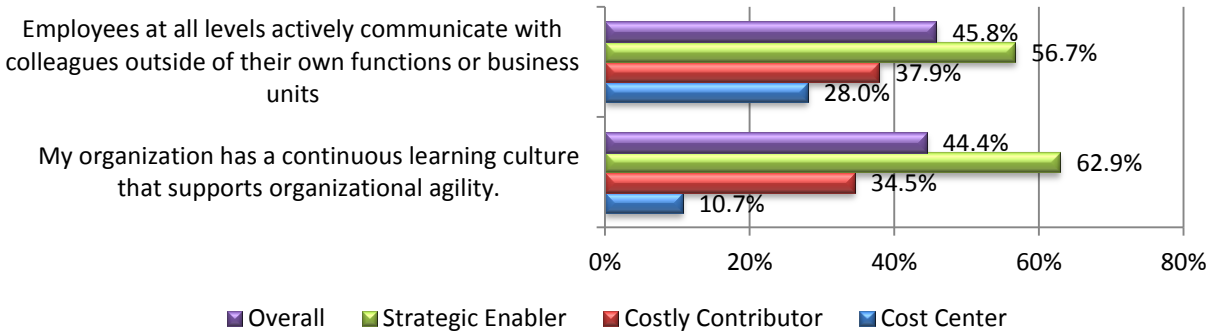
- 45.6 percent more likely to say that they currently foster a learning culture to increase agility.
- 30.3 percent more likely to develop high-potential employees to lead the organization through change.
- 39.5 percent more likely to have a process in place to continuously realign the learning strategy with the business.
- 27.8 percent more likely to integrate learning with the performance management process.

Is Learning Culture Used Now to Increase Agility?

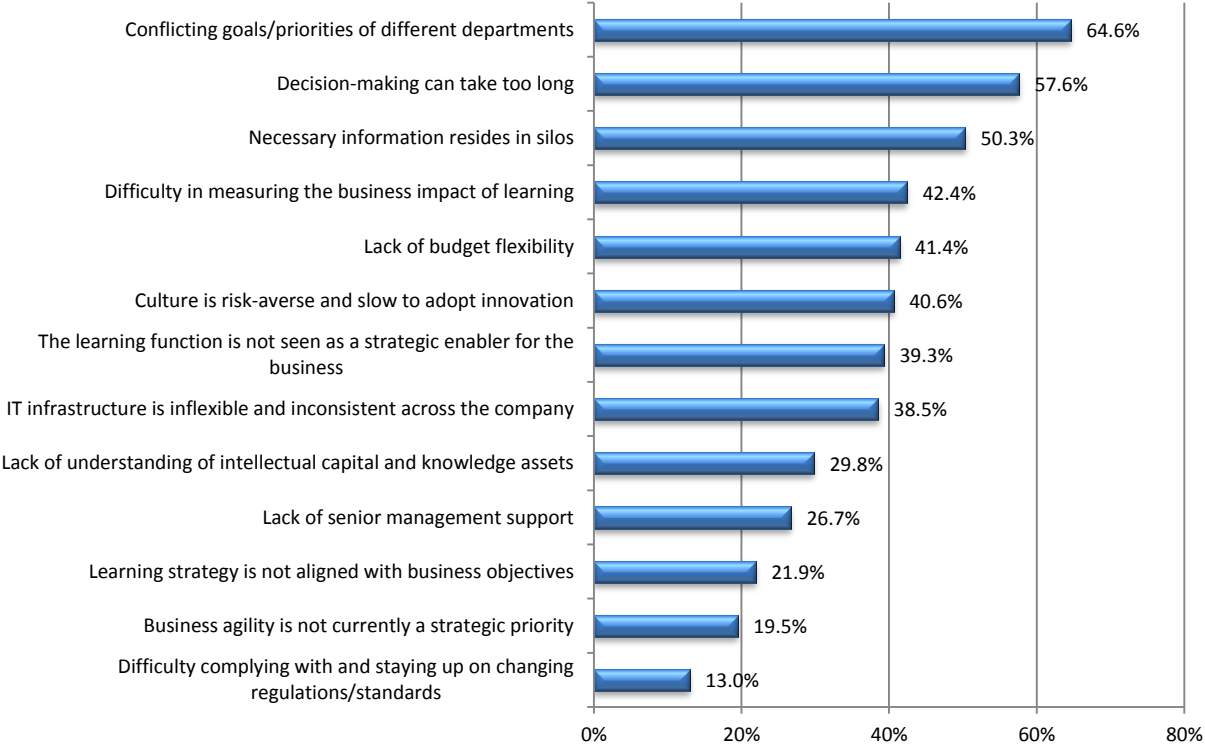


In addition, strategic enablers are dramatically more likely than costly contributors and cost centers to say that employees at their organization actively communicate with colleagues outside of their own functions and business units. Finally, strategic enablers are 52.2 percent more likely than cost centers to say that their organization has a continuous learning culture that supports organizational agility.

Learning Culture Practices



Obstacles to Increasing Organizational Agility



We asked learning leaders about the obstacles to increasing organizational agility through the learning function. The most commonly cited obstacles involve organizational culture — the conflicting goals of different departments, the slow process of decision-making and siloed information.

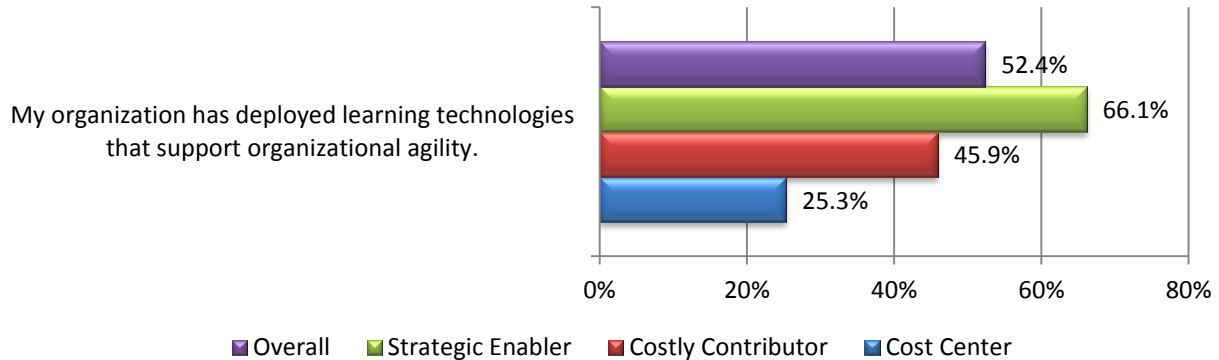
The difference between cost centers and strategic enablers is also interesting. For cost centers, everything looks like an obstacle. They were more likely to have every obstacle we asked about, except the difficulty of measuring business impact of learning, and difficulty keeping up with changing regulations and standards, which were more likely to be obstacles for strategic enablers.

Top three obstacles by alignment maturity:

Cost Centers	Costly Contributors	Strategic Enablers
Conflicting goals/priorities of different departments	Conflicting goals/priorities of different departments	Conflicting goals and priorities of different departments
Learning function not seen as a strategic enabler for the business	Decision-making can take too long	Decision-making can take too long
Decision-making can take too long	Learning function not seen as a strategic enabler for the business	Necessary information resides in silos

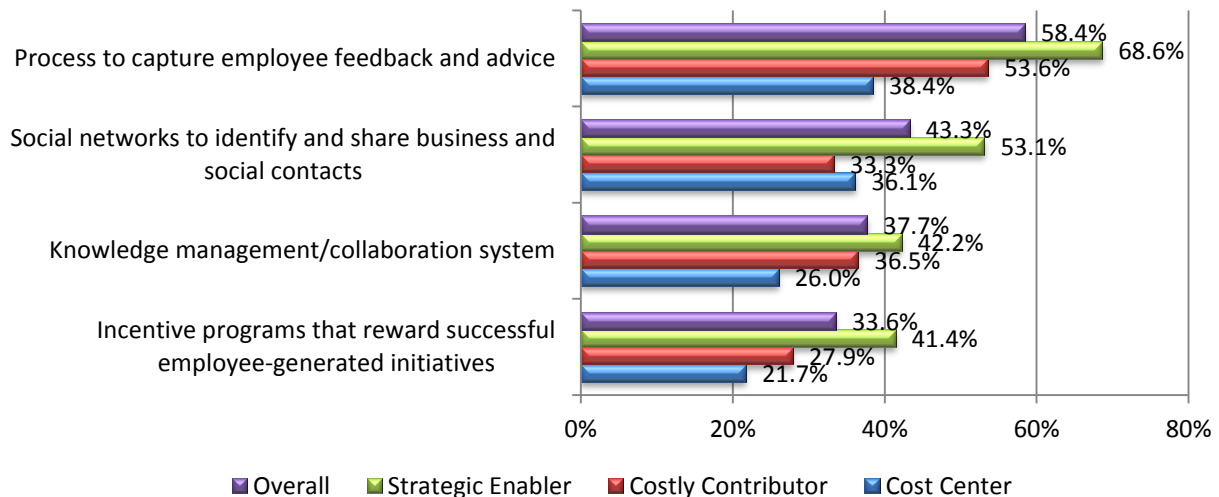
Agility and Learning Technologies

More than half of all respondents report they have deployed learning technologies that support organizational agility. Strategic enablers are dramatically more likely to have used learning technologies to increase agility.



Strategic enablers are nearly 14 percent more likely to use learning technologies to increase organizational agility than the population as a whole, and more than 40 percent more likely to use learning technologies to increase organizational agility than cost centers. It is unsurprising then that 38 percent of learning leaders we surveyed report they expect the spending on learning technologies related to organizational agility to increase during the next three years. Nearly 43 percent expect spending on these technologies to stay about the same.

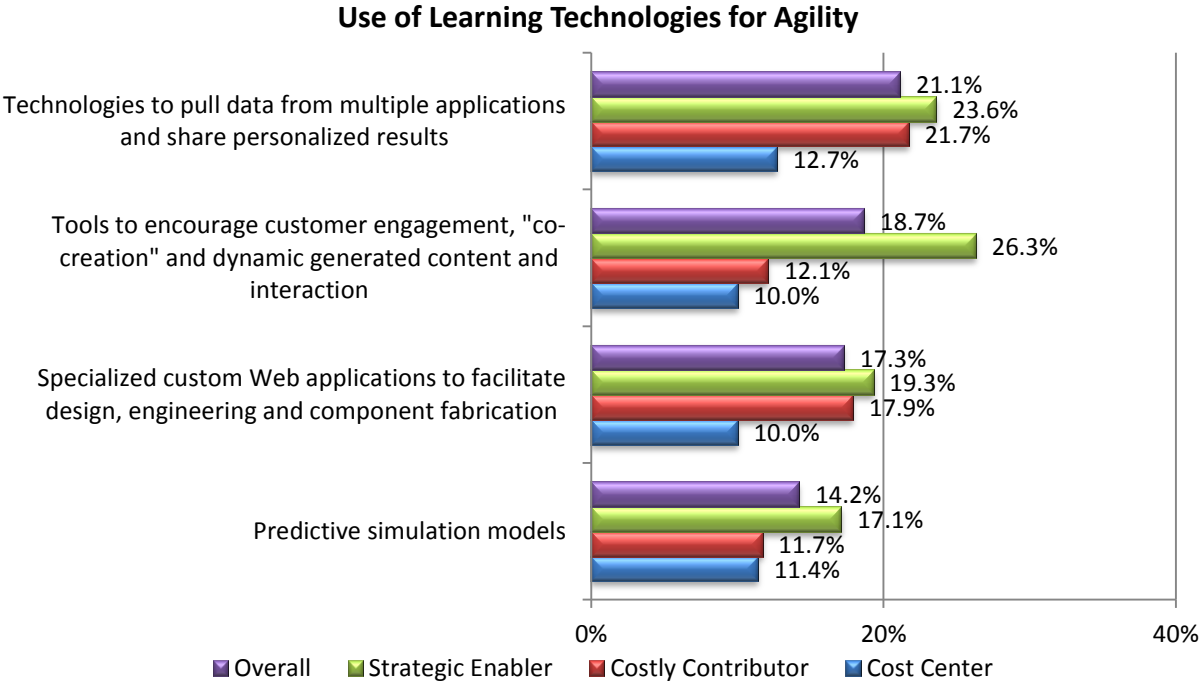
Use of Learning Technologies for Agility



Strategic enablers are also more likely to be using specific kinds of technologies and technology strategies to increase organizational agility. Nearly 69 percent of strategic enablers say they have a process to capture employee feedback and advice, and 53.1 percent say they are using social networks

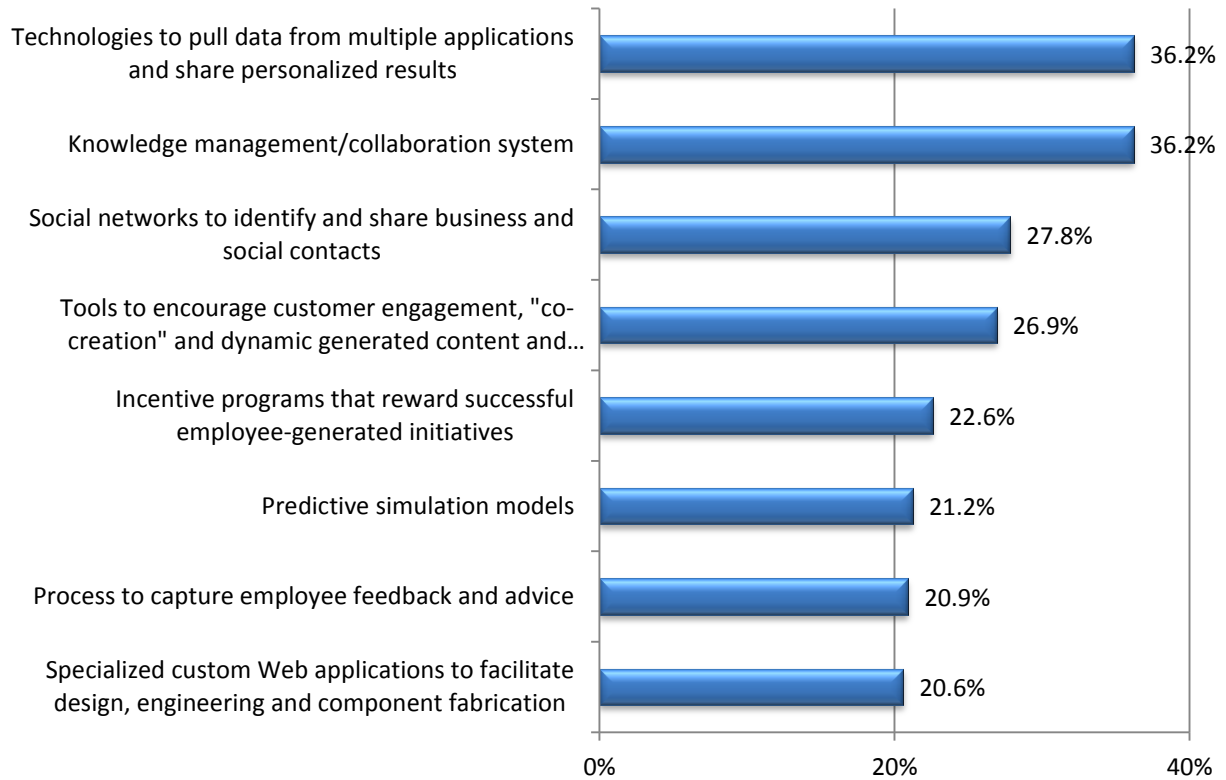
to identify and share business and social contacts. Strategic enablers are also more than twice as likely to use incentive programs that reward successful employee-generated initiatives.

Even though use of the following technologies is not widespread (in the 15-25 percent range), strategic enablers are significantly more likely to be using them:



We asked respondents who were not using these technologies whether they had plans to adopt them in the next three years. The largest areas of predicted growth in learning technologies involve technologies that aggregate data from multiple applications and personalize results, knowledge management systems and social technologies for connecting people, and crowd-sourced content creation.

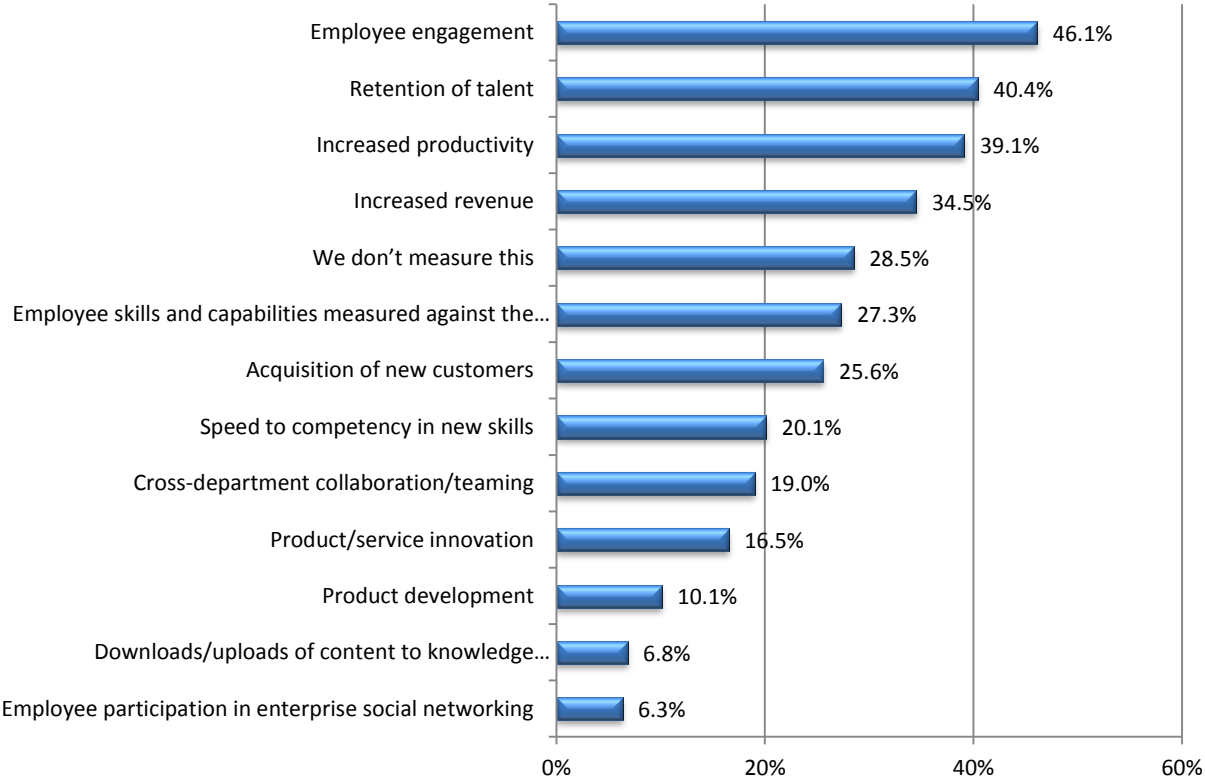
Plans to Adopt Learning Technologies Within Next Three Years



Measuring the L&D Contribution to Agility

We asked learning leaders what metrics they have been using to measure the impact of learning and development on organizational agility. The most commonly used metrics are employee engagement and retention, followed by increased productivity and revenue. However, 28.5 percent of organizations report that they do not measure any specific metrics related to organizational agility.

Metrics Used to Measure Impact of L&D on Organizational Agility



What did emerge in open comments from learning leaders was that many of them view measurement efforts, particularly return on investment efforts, as a key way to communicate the importance of L&D's role in increasing organizational agility with their business leaders. Many respondents reported that demonstrating the business impact of L&D programs helps them to make the case to leadership and gain a seat at the leadership table. This finding is consistent with our previous research on learning strategy alignment, where we learned that strategic enablers were constantly communicating the value of the learning function to their leadership.

Contact Information

About HCM Advisory Group

Human Capital Media (HCM) Advisory Group is the research division of Chief Learning Officer magazine. Our mission is to focus on human capital issues that are relevant and important to senior leaders. Our research is designed and delivered to allow the consumer to demonstrate thought leadership by accessing real-time, high-level findings.

Sarah Kimmel, Director of HCM Advisory Group

Sarah Kimmel has 12 years of experience as a business research consultant on human capital projects, specifically training, learning, performance, leadership development and knowledge management. Most recently, she was a learning research strategist on the global learning strategy team at Accenture. She has special expertise in the design, implementation and analysis of training and learning research, including both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

If you have any questions, contact us at skimmel@humancapitalmedia.com.

About Saba

Saba enables global organizations to build a transformative workplace that leverages the advent of social networking in business and the ubiquity of mobile to empower an organization's most mission-critical assets — its people. The company provides a set of people-centric enterprise solutions to various businesses and industries worldwide. Saba delivers cloud-based learning, performance, planning and collaboration solutions to transform the way people work.

Saba's premier customer base includes major global organizations and industry leaders in financial services, life sciences, health care, high-tech, automotive, manufacturing, retail, energy and utilities, packaged goods, and public sector organizations. Headquartered in Redwood Shores, Calif., Saba has offices on five continents. For more information, please visit www.saba.com or call 1-877-SABA-101 or 1-650-779-2791. SABA, the Saba logo, and the marks relating to Saba products and services referenced herein are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Saba Software Inc. or its affiliates. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.