# absorb

up your
AGILITY.

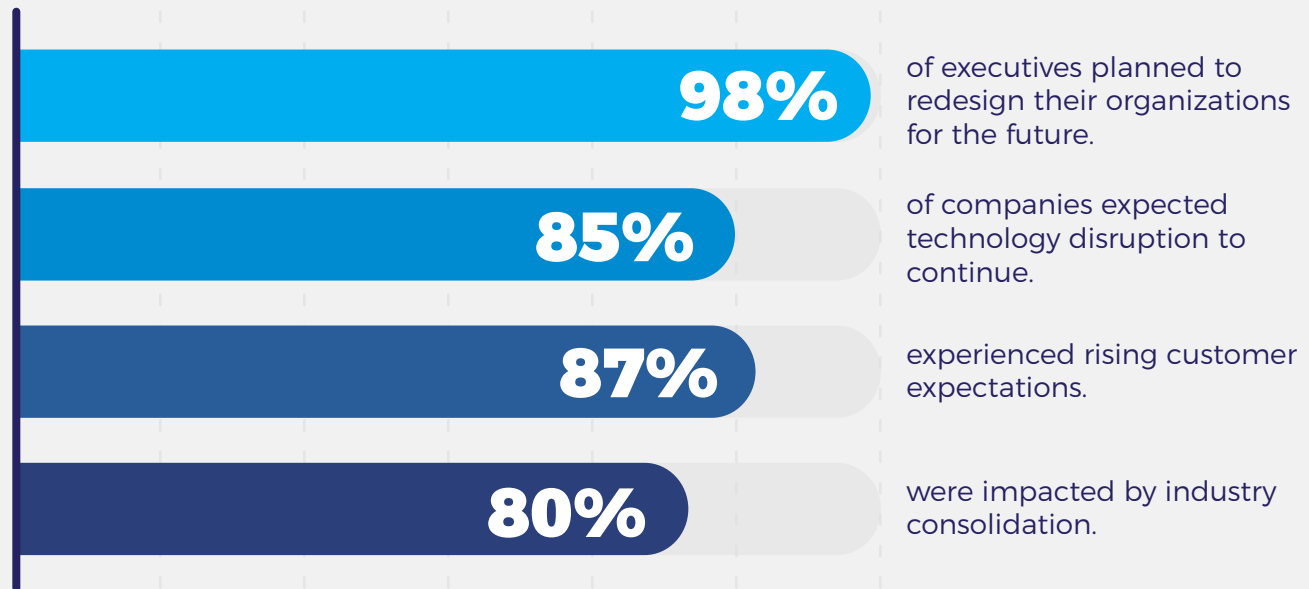## 4 Ways Learning is the Key to Corporate Transformation and Agility

Overview

In recent years, we've seen a significant shift in how organizations and learners approach learning. Life is moving faster than ever, and we're surrounded by change at every turn. Automation, artificial intelligence and technology continue to reshape our workplaces. For many businesses and workers, it's difficult keeping up with the rapid pace of change.

Fortunately, embracing transformation can help people and businesses survive and thrive. But how can we ready ourselves for change that hasn't occurred yet? How can we prepare for the future of business?
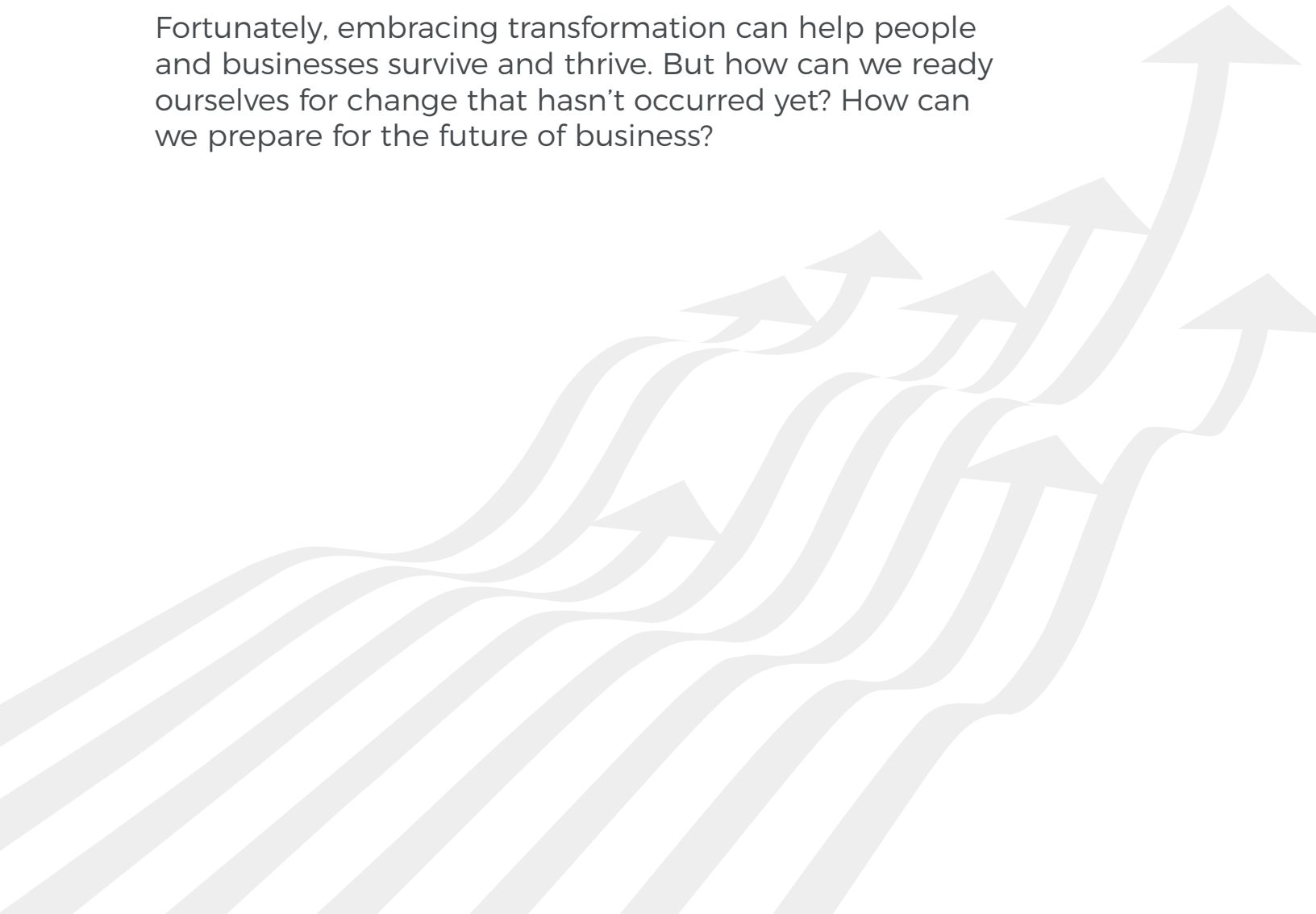
Entering the Age of Business Transformation

Organizations around the world suspected a major, transformational change was on the horizon. According to Mercer's **2020 The Global Talent Trends** Study:

98% of executives planned to redesign their organizations for the future.

85% of companies expected technology disruption to continue.

87% experienced rising customer expectations.

80% were impacted by industry consolidation.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit workplaces, new issues of uncertainty emerged. Companies around the world found themselves in the middle of a business transformation. To keep workers and customers safe, organizations were forced to ask challenging business questions like:

- Are we equipped to support permanent remote workers?
- Are we agile enough to withstand this and future unpredictable events?
- How will we reinvigorate our business to remain competitive?
- How do we address skill and resource gaps due to layoffs?
- How do we communicate with and train our people on new protocols?
- How can we support the health and wellness of our people?
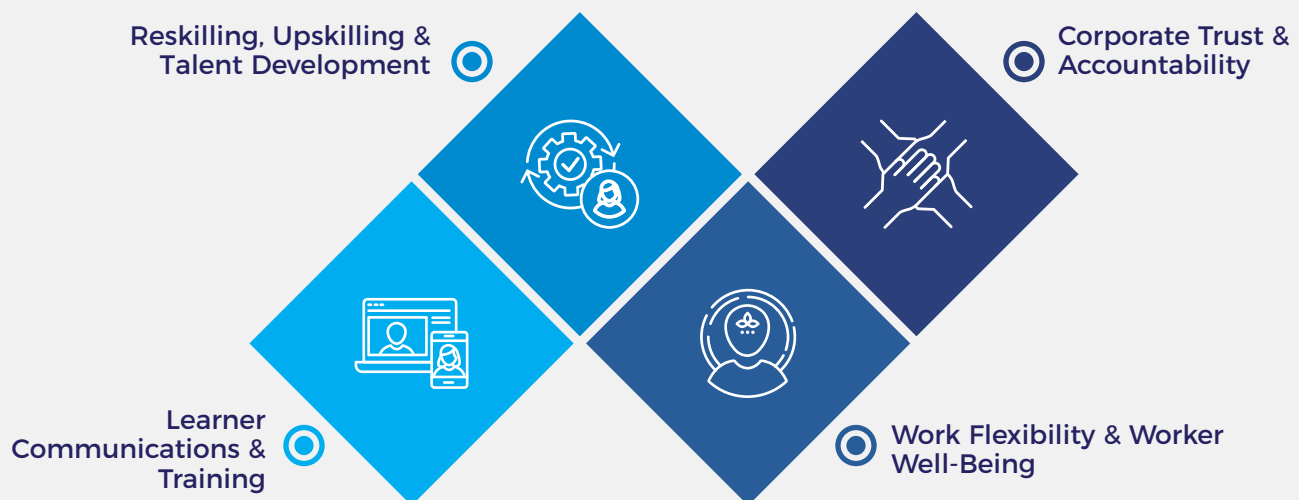- Is our current approach to work sustainable for the future?

Now that we're past the initial effects of the pandemic, it's clear that work has evolved. Organizations must face uncharted territory by rethinking how to structure their workplaces, processes and operations to stay agile, while also focusing on the long-term work transformation. Because the truth is, while businesses may be able to resume pre-pandemic business operations, a whopping **96% of workers** want some amount of remote work to continue.

When faced with disruption, smart organizations learn how to transform and overcome obstacles. They're willing to change in order to reinvigorate their business to conquer their goals; achieve competitive and productive outcomes; find and retain the best talent; outpace the competition; drive revenue and optimize ROI; and drive awareness and demand for products and services.

The 4 Ways Learning Can Prepare Businesses for Change

Understanding how to overcome obstacles leads to strategic transformation and successful outcomes. While many organizations are making plans for sustainable remote and blended working arrangements, and for attracting, training and retaining talent, they're also facing greater expectations around corporate trust, accountability and social issues. With so much transformation on the horizon, learning is the key to overcoming these obstacles and leading the way for successful change.

Let's look at four complex challenges that many organizations face, and how learning is at the center of the solution.

Reskilling, Upskilling & Talent Development

Corporate Trust & Accountability

Learner Communications & Training

Work Flexibility & Worker Well-Being

1. Learner Communications and Training

It's unclear how workplaces will continue to change, but according to a **2020 Gartner survey**, 82% of company leaders plan to allow their employees to work remotely some of the time. This creates new challenges around communication; it will change how employees and colleagues work together, receive training, learn from one another, gain insight from leaders and build healthy relationships. Learning and development programs must align with changes to ensure executives, employees and other stakeholders are equipped, engaged and aware of expectations.

Organizations must step up and provide clear and continuous communication to employees, vendors and partners in response to workforce shifts. As an organization's response strategy evolves, staying agile, transparent and prepared for whatever comes next is essential. It's also worth providing employees, partners and leaders with insight into how their jobs might change—and how they can prepare now.

Learning programs play a critical role in business transformation. Here are a few ways to overcome communication-related challenges through learning:

Employees

- Introduce new workplace safety training for those returning to the workplace
- Update company policies and guidelines to reflect remote working security, new hybrid and in-office procedures, etc.
- Transform the onboarding process to satisfy the needs of in-office, hybrid and remote workers
- Create new or revised eLearning programs and adjust them based on workforce needs
- Host regular town halls and Q&As to encourage connection between your in-person and virtual teams

Partners and Contractors

- Educate them on new policies and operations
- Administer microlearning, videos and tools to inform of any changes in real-time

Organizational Leaders

- Encourage executives to listen and respond to concerns from employees, partners, vendors, etc.
- Administer training and best practices for managing remote and blended workforces
- Employ training that helps leaders manage changing worker expectations

2. Reskilling, Upskilling and Talent Development

Reskilling and Upskilling

To prepare for successful transformation, organizations must be willing to invest in their people. Providing opportunities to learn new skills and improve existing ones will ensure that employees thrive when faced with tomorrow's business challenges.

Most employees recognize today's fast pace of business and feel pressured to train themselves for what's ahead. According to Mercer's 2019 Global Talent Trends, 83% of employees believe it's primarily their responsibility to keep their skills up to date. In Mercer's 2021 report, 78% of employees said they were ready to reskill, and many turned online to do so. Above all else, upskilling and reskilling is how companies plan to drive transformation in 2021.

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Workers and organizations alike believe learning will play a critical role in the future of business. Investing in upskilling and reskilling—and adopting a culture of learning in the workplace—are necessary for connecting an individual's performance with an organization's long-term success.

How Employees, Partner and Vendors Benefit

During times of transformation, providing opportunities for continuous learning, reskilling and upskilling are critical to an employee's success. For example, an employee may need to learn new skills as a result of layoffs and operational shifts, or they may need to embrace a fully digital work environment. Many others will face the natural process of certain job skills becoming obsolete. Providing employees with opportunities to learn new skills will result in greater confidence in their roles—and therefore, more successful outcomes. This also applies to partners and vendors.

How Organizations Benefit

Around 50% of all employees will need to be reskilled in the next five years, which means organizations that invest in learning, reskilling and upskilling can expect to see a more significant ROI. In fact, 66% of employers expect to see a return on those investments within one year.

For example, adopting a comprehensive learning program following layoffs and other organizational shifts is more likely to improve business efficiencies and productivity. Sharing knowledge amongst learners will ensure critical skills and information aren't lost when someone leaves the organization.
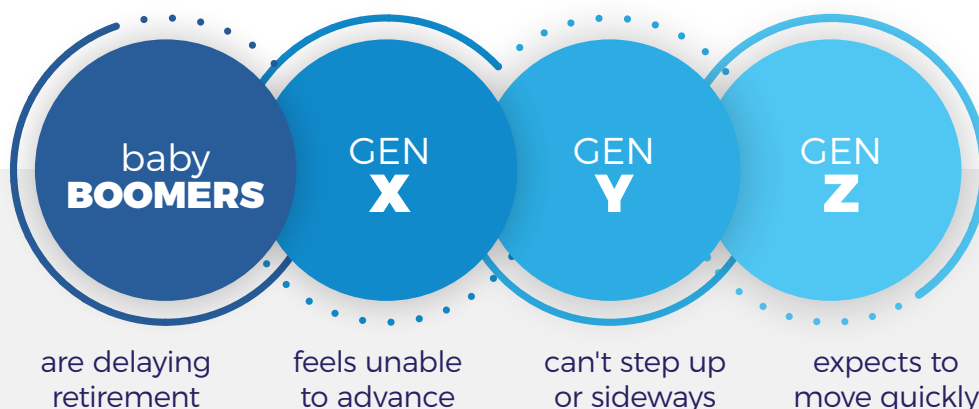
Attracting and Retaining Talent

The COVID-19 pandemic proved the importance of having a remote practice to attract and recruit new talent, onboard employees and facilitate training and development. Hybrid workplaces require a similar system.

Human Resources and recruiting teams will likely become experts in this process. However, all managers and team leaders should learn how to:

· Conduct effective interviews through video conferencing
· Manage a remote onboarding experience
· Mentor and develop learning paths for blended workforces to promote strong achievers

People are attracted to roles where they believe they can grow and positively impact the business. However, attracting great people—and keeping them—hinges on whether those opportunities exist. This can get complicated as, according to Mercer's 2020 Global Talent Trends, the four workforce demographic segments have different expectations and desires.

baby **BOOMERS** — are delaying retirement

GEN **X** — feels unable to advance

GEN **Y** — can't step up or sideways

GEN **Z** — expects to move quickly

Regardless of background, age or experience, employees must learn to embrace others' strengths and collaborate effectively. Learning from their colleagues' expertise and preferences can even help an employee find new opportunities to grow. And according to **Purdue University**, employers can create optimal work environments for all generations by considering their different needs:

- ○ Baby Boomers are partial to goals and deadlines, mentorship opportunities and feedback through coaching

- ○ Gen X prefers immediate feedback, career development opportunities and work-life balance

- ○ Millennials thrive on personal interaction, results-driven management and flexible work schedules

- ○ Gen Z seeks out many simultaneous projects, independent or self-directed projects and work-life balance

Organizations will need to revisit their people strategy to meet and adjust to varying expectations. Exploring non-traditional career paths or developing new career models may be necessary to attract and retain talent within these different generations of workers.

3. Work Flexibility and Worker Well-Being

Flexibility in the Workplace

Mercer's 2020 **Move Forward With Confidence** article found that even before the pandemic, an estimated 16% of workers in the United States performed their job duties remotely at least part of the time. After COVID-19 ushered workers into their homes, 88% said they worked remotely at least part of the time. While this number has **begun to decrease** in 2021, especially in the United States, some businesses say they'll continue to operate with a fully remote or hybrid workforce.

16% of workers had performed their job duties remotely at least part of the time, before COVID-19

88% now said they worked remotely, after COVID-19
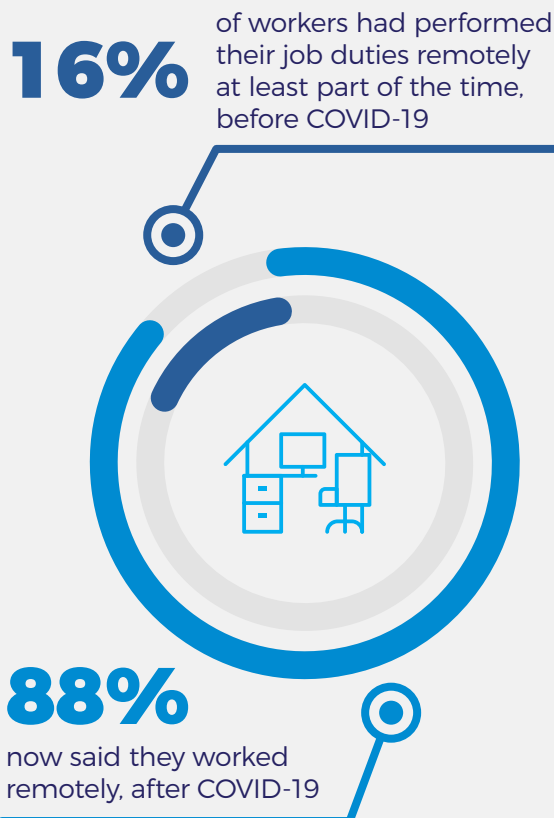
This represents an opportunity—and a responsibility—for employers to reimagine and redefine the worker experience. The pandemic proved many could work from home. But not everyone is working without distractions—for many, productivity at home is hindered by responsibilities like parenting, caregiving and personal health. Those affected are challenged to fit more into their day and perform faster.

A comprehensive eLearning program can empower employees, partners and leaders to resolve unique issues in a sustained remote working environment.

Key learning opportunities for employees include:

- · How to run remote meetings effectively
- · How to manage and mentor team members
- · How to achieve a better work-life balance
- · How to provide opportunities for team building and engagement

Key learning opportunities for partners and vendors include:

- How to adapt to a more flexible work environment
- How to prepare for or fill gaps in the supply chain
- How to integrate changing policies/ procedures to daily operations

Key learning opportunities for leaders include:

- How to support remote and hybrid workers
- How to establish a team culture of trust, patience and tolerance
- How to manage workers in a long-term remote or blended working environment

Organizations can support this transition by training workers and leaders on practices and processes designed to help them work more efficiently.

Workforce Well-Being

It's not enough to simply set up workers with the right equipment to work from home. Their well-being should also be monitored and managed—especially during times of change and transformation. In a 2020 report from Oracle and Workplace Intelligence, **76% of workers** believed their employer should be doing more for their mental health. They need meaningful support and resources to help them thrive and manage stress.

Successful learning and wellness programs aim to address emotional, financial, psychological and physical needs. Such programs can help build resilience, confidence and peace of mind, and can have an influential, positive impact during times of transformation.

EMOTIONAL

PHYSICAL

FINANCIAL

PSYCHOLOGICAL
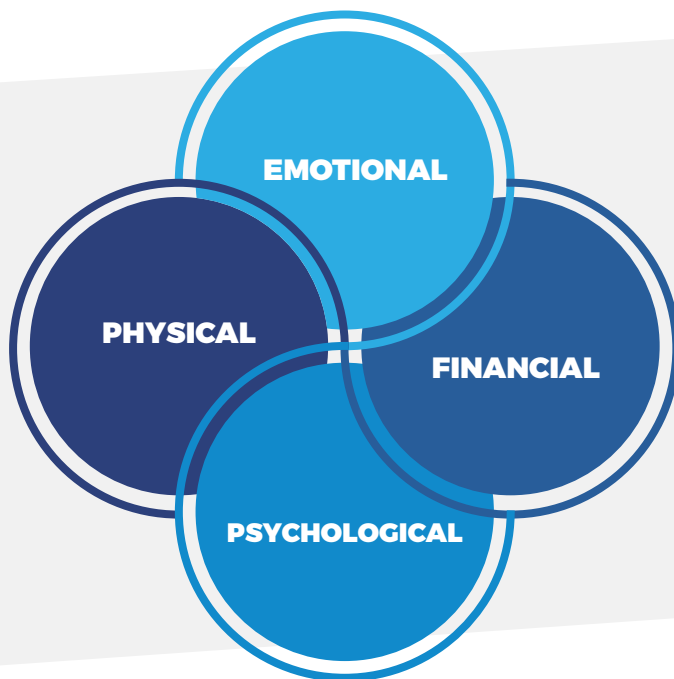
flexibility &
WELL-BEING

Successful remote workforce strategies need to focus more holistically and address the well-being of the workforce.

Building a culture of wellness in your workplace calls for more than an executive-led mandate. Instead, it requires a mind shift that involves learning at every level in the organization. Strategies with the most significant impact include:

- Training managers on the importance of flexible working
- Providing flexible workers with visible career paths

- Building trust between the company and its workers
- Providing opportunities to measure and reward flexible workers' contributions
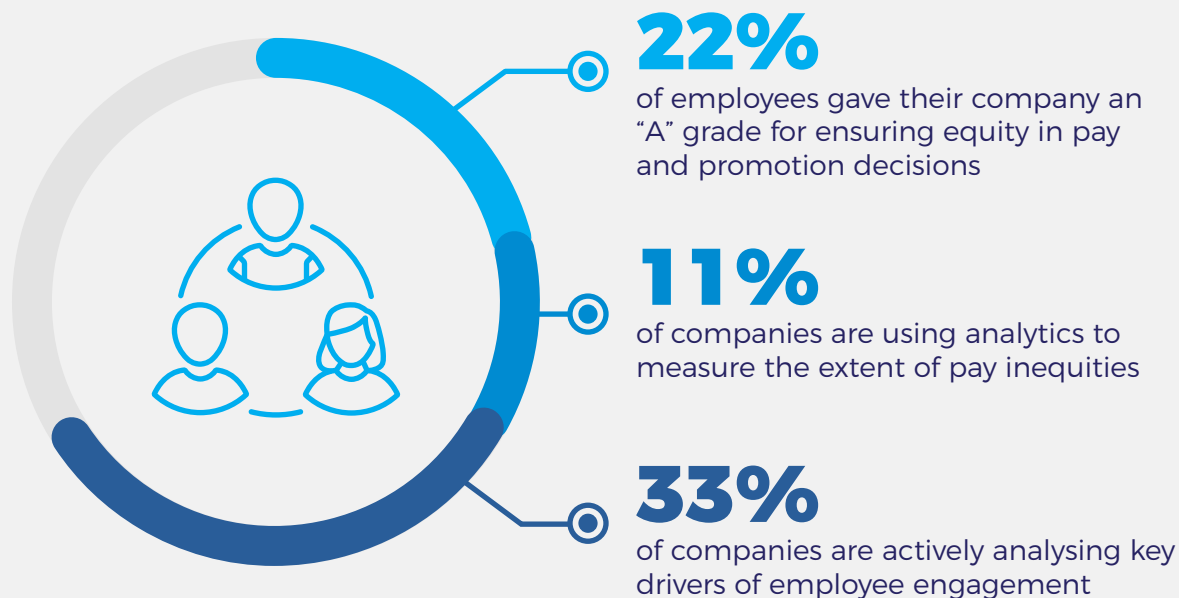
- Using technology that supports and encourages flexible working
- Personalizing training
- Redesigning jobs to allow for more flexibility

4. Corporate Trust and Accountability

Today's workers seek purpose, inspiration, connectivity and most importantly, trust from their employers. Organizations are experiencing heightened expectations from employees—and the public—to demonstrate their commitment to social improvements and strengthen their policies and behaviors around diversity and inclusion, gender parity, pay equity and environmental issues.

People seek out employers whose values align with theirs. Businesses that connect actions, policies and practices with corporate values, and hold themselves accountable, will attract the talent they desire. They'll also gain trust and commitment from their existing employees.

How well do companies stand up for the values they promote? The **2019 Global Talent Trends** report found that:

22%
of employees gave their company an "A" grade for ensuring equity in pay and promotion decisions

11%
of companies are using analytics to measure the extent of pay inequities

33%
of companies are actively analysing key drivers of employee engagement

These numbers are steadily increasing, but organizations have a long way to go. Here are a few ways learning can help move the needle:

Learning and Development and HR departments can mine their data and learn what's important to their learners using perspective-gathering tools like surveys, emails and feedback activities. Taking this extra step ensures they're designing fair, inclusive programs that don't represent institutionalized biases.

Management needs to understand what makes people stay—is it job security, professional development, flexible schedules, compensation or a combination? What someone values and prefers will differ based on their age, experience, career goals and income level. Taking time to understand those values and how they differ will lay the foundation for developing a relevant, supportive and compelling employer brand.

Workers must learn how to embody corporate values. To communicate values, organizations can use social and training platforms. Training paths with effective metrics can help cascade corporate values throughout the organization.

Conclusion

It's clear the **corporate learning** function within organizations must be recognized as something more than a way to close technical skills gaps. Learning continues to grow as a strategic imperative and should be recognized as a fundamental aspect to addressing core business challenges.

Learning can drive transformation around operations; mitigate risk; promote agility; support critical thinking and creative problem solving; build and reinforce trust in the workplace; promote physical, emotional and social wellness; and help to define, communicate and reinforce purpose.

Organizations looking to thrive in the future of business—and overcome times of disruption and uncertainty—must be willing to adopt a learning culture that embodies and encourages transformation at every level.

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