



WHAT LEARNERS WANT: NEW STRATEGIES FOR TRAINING DELIVERY



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ABOUT TRAINING INDUSTRY RESEARCH

Information and insights that inspire innovation. Harnessing the collective wisdom of learning professionals and their unique perspectives on the business of training, our research informs and guides the entire market landscape – from assessments to workforce development. Our experienced analysts share leading-edge insights and best practices for the corporate training professional by capturing the perspectives of learning professionals, learners and training companies across a diverse array of industries about relevant and emerging topics, such as learning methods, leadership development, learning technologies, and measurement. Our deep ties with the training community is the foundation of our peer-based actionable information and the reason Training Industry is the most trusted source of information on the business of learning™.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's learning environment has changed and is continuing to evolve. A sizable portion of the workforce is working in nontraditional ways, including through contract, temporary and virtual work. Further complicating the learning environment, employees are more distracted than ever: They receive hundreds of emails each day and are often interrupted by messages on their smartphones and other devices. Perhaps due to these distractions and the proliferation of web-based information, learners have come

to expect on-demand access to job-relevant information. They have learned to rely on their social networks and informal sources of information for learning. All of these factors impact the ability of learning and development (L&D) programs to engage learners.

Fortunately, numerous learning modalities, technologies and techniques are available to address the needs of the modern learner. Training professionals have a toolbox full

of training delivery techniques to engage learners, from traditional **instructor-led training (ILT)** to newer methods such as augmented reality and all stops in between. Each modality offers a different learner experience that may be more or less appealing, and it is often difficult for L&D professionals to gauge how learners perceive these experiences and when each method might be most effectively used.

However, modalities should be chosen based on the possible forms and functions of the learning content, as it is well established that how learners think they learn has no bearing

on whether learning actually takes place or not.¹ In that respect, the role of L&D is to offer choices within the constraints of the learning content, rather than cater to the preferences of learners independent of what knowledge or skill they're attempting to acquire.

“Why offer choices,” one might wonder, “if there’s no scientific evidence that learners’ preferences impact learning?” No training happens in a vacuum — the experience of engaging with training matters within the broader context of how an employee feels about their job and the organization. Any given employee has been trained in

the past and will be again in the future, so their cumulative experience and attitudes about learning are important to how they engage with both mandatory and voluntary training opportunities.

In the pages that follow, we’ll discuss the choices that learners make in training and how they respond to different delivery strategies. By focusing not only on how learners want to learn, but also on the match between their choices and what we’re actually using to deliver training, we’re better able to understand the broader impacts of delivery method choice.

¹ <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/learning-styles-preferences/>

To investigate this topic, Training Industry, Inc. pooled the results of six research survey efforts: four baseline surveys in 2017 and 2018, one survey in 2020 and one in 2022. Combined, the sample totaled 1,501 learners who participated in 3,735 training programs within the previous 12 months. This report is an updated look at learners' preferences, comparing both samples and, when relevant, highlighting what changed in 2022. The results emphasize the importance of taking learner choice into consideration when designing training programs and provide guidance on when and how to meet employee preferences in ways that lead to improved training outcomes.

In short, this report will explore the following four questions about learners and the ways companies deliver training to them:

- 1 | How would learners prefer to receive training?
- 2 | What delivery methods do they think are effective?
- 3 | How are they currently receiving training?
- 4 | Does offering learners a choice of format make any difference?

In the final section of this report, we'll offer recommendations for organizations seeking to maximize their training investments by offering more choices for learners to engage with training content.

Training professionals must consider learners choices when designing and delivering training.

WHAT DO LEARNERS WANT?

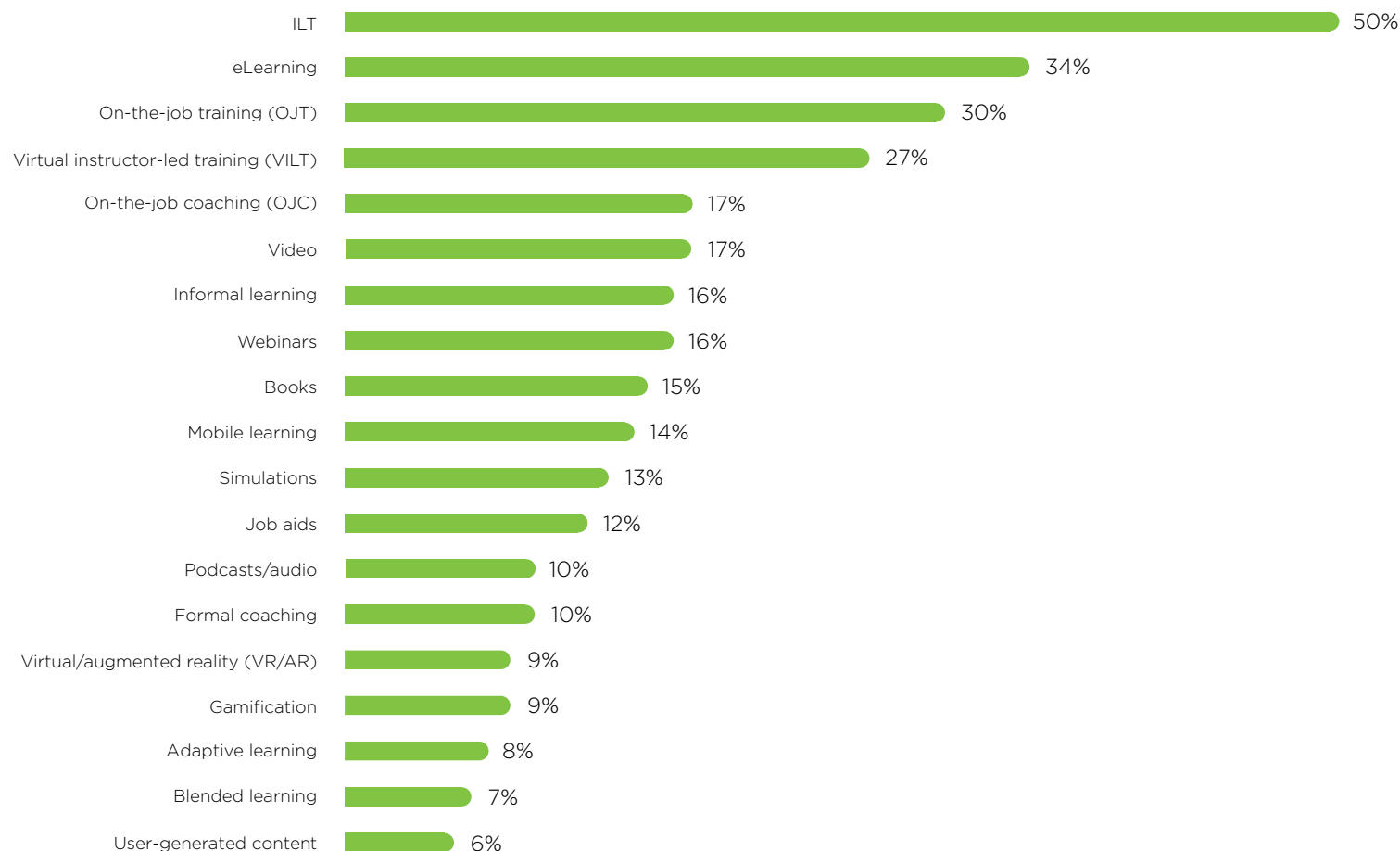
Learners are active participants in their own learning experience, and they have their own beliefs about the best way to learn. While these beliefs may not align with reality (and it can be hard to debunk such misplaced beliefs even in learning researchers²), the ideas will still influence learner behavior. To that end, L&D can present choices for learners when possible, allowing them to choose — but not demand — the format of learning they engage with. Understanding the preferences and presenting a few options for employees to choose from can improve word-of-mouth reviews of training and increase voluntary consumption of content. This makes it more likely that employees will take the steps to enhance their learning, allow L&D to have better data flows to assess training outcomes and improve return on investment (ROI) when multiple methods are included in training design.

² <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00444/fullpreferences/>



Figure 1.

Learners' Preferred Modalities Across All Training Topic Areas



LEARNER PROFILE



When their jobs are complex, learners prefer virtual and informal modalities.



Different generations want the same things.



Learners with more direct reports prefer self-paced methods of learning.

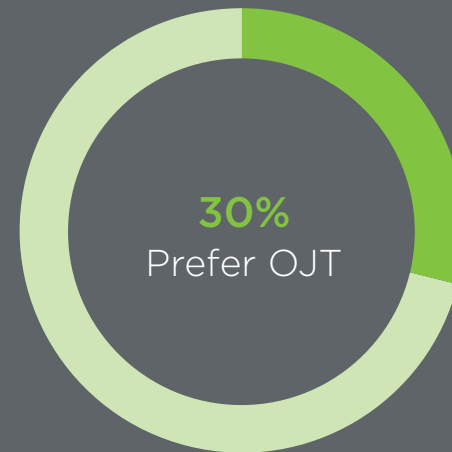
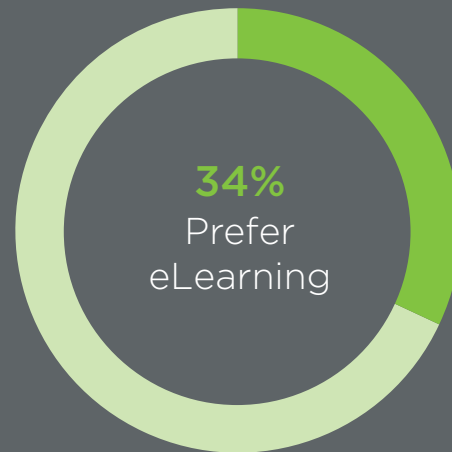
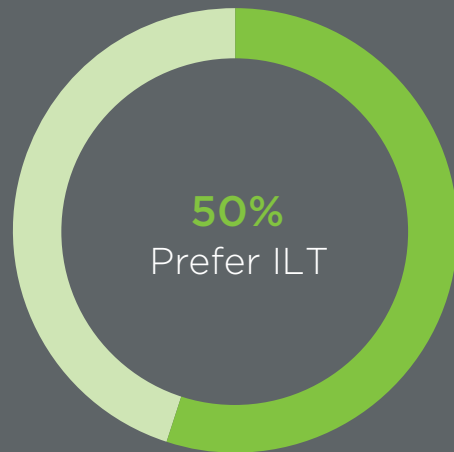


Our research shows a clear overall winner when it comes to how learners want to learn: Half selected ILT as a preferred method of training (see [Figure 1](#) on page 9). This finding is predictable given its predominant use in education; classroom-based training is, for many, the standard paradigm for learning. Moreover, it lends itself to a number of classic, tried-and-true educational techniques including lecture, visual presentation and group work.

Both ILT and [eLearning](#) allow learners more freedom in determining the location where

they will participate. eLearning takes that freedom of choice one step further than ILT by allowing learners to choose when and at what pace they complete training. [On-the-job training \(OJT\)](#) is beneficial for employees because it enables them to discover and refine their job-related skills, make decisions and tackle challenges directly in the work environment. It also allows employees to learn from their mistakes and receive immediate feedback on their performance. Notably, these modalities are offered in locations that are convenient for learners.

WHAT DO LEARNERS WANT?



1/2 of learners prefer classroom-based ILT.



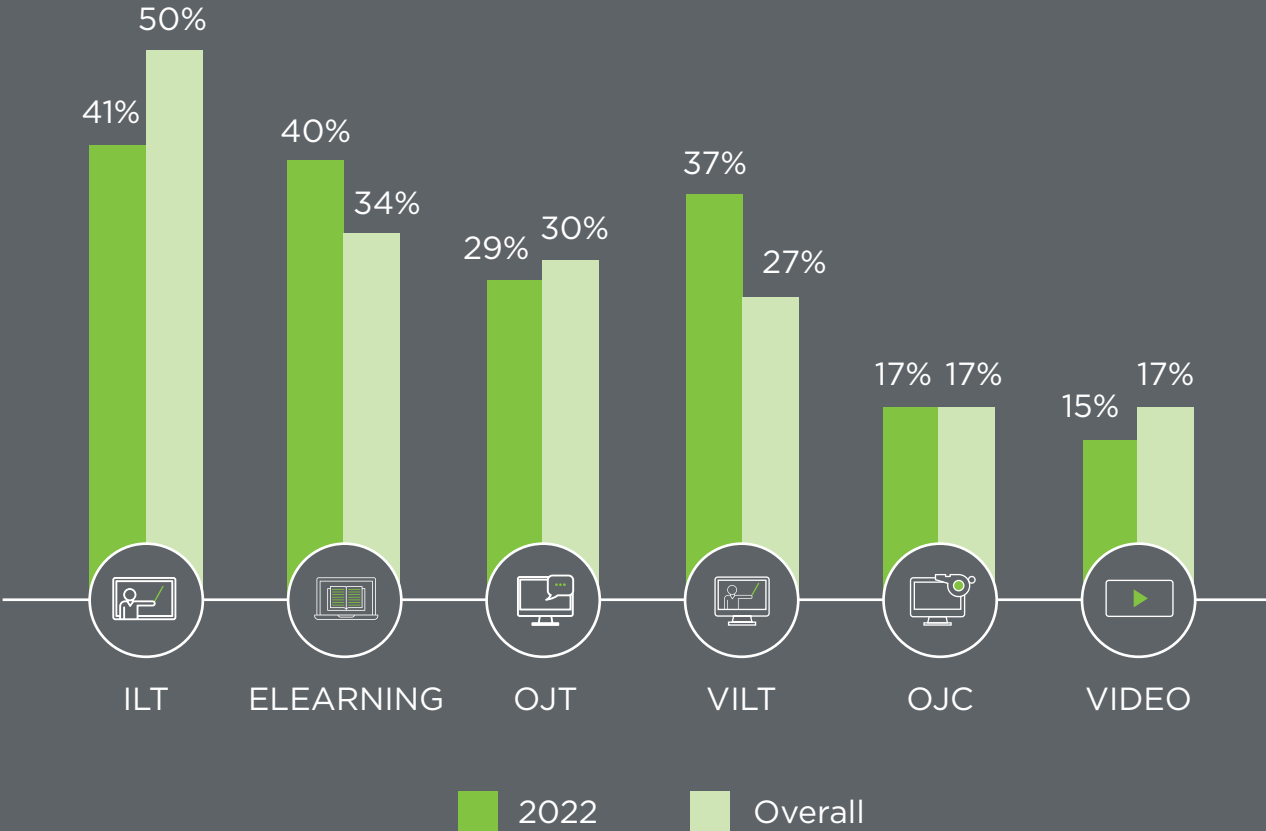
Key Takeaways

1/2 of learners prefer classroom-based, instructor-led training, but preference for virtual modalities is on the rise.

To explore whether these preferences may be shifting, we compared the overall averages with those from only our 2022 survey respondents, as shown in Figure 2.

Of particular note is what Figure 2 suggests about the rise of virtual modalities. On the heels of the shift to remote and hybrid work that began in 2020, and for training that could meet the needs of employees in such arrangements, we see more learners identify eLearning and **virtual instructor-led training (VILT)** as preferred learning methods. ILT still wins, barely, but the figure shows a move toward eLearning and VILT while pulling back from ILT, while the preferences for other modalities are largely unchanged over time.

Figure 2.
Learners' Top 6 Preferred Modalities Across All Training Topic Areas, 2022 Comparison



LEARNER PREFERENCES BY TRAINING TOPIC

Differences in learner modality preferences may be driven by differences in how they want to learn specific topics. Results show that preferred delivery methods differ across six common topic areas (see [Figure 3](#) on page 14). While ILT tops the list for every training topic except compliance, there were differences in the prevalence of this preference across topics or topic areas with ILT being preferred most often for leadership development and least often for compliance training. On-the-job training also differed across topics and was most commonly preferred as a modality for onboarding. On-the-

job coaching (OJC) was preferred most often for sales, customer service and onboarding and least often for technical and compliance training. Finally, learners preferred eLearning most for compliance training, technical training, customer service training and leadership development and least for both sales training and onboarding. Collectively, these findings are expected given the differences in the nature of content, the different employee populations served by these types of training and the types of strategic investments organizations are less likely to support different training objectives.

Learner preferences are a modern take on learning styles. Learn more about why you should emphasize preferences over styles [here](#).



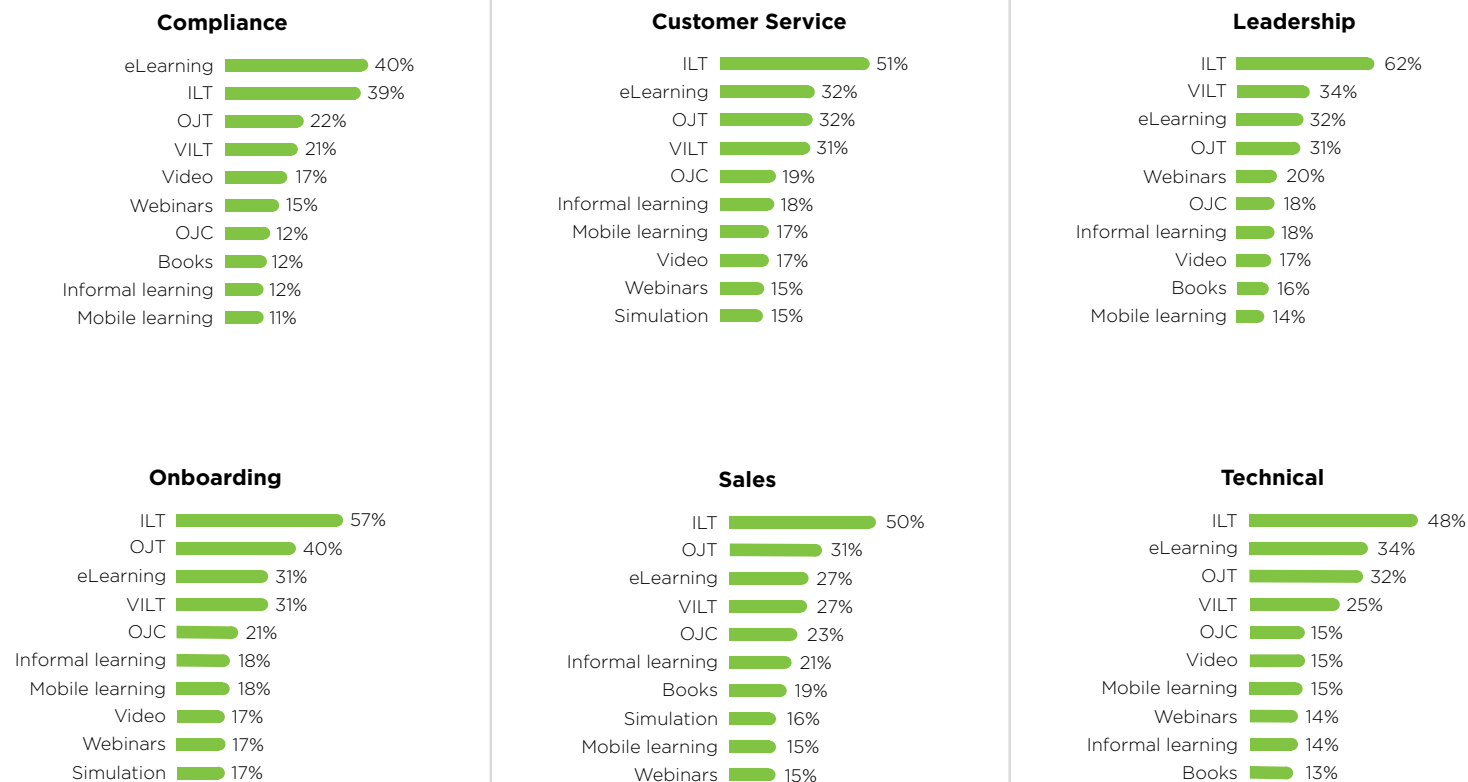
Voice of the Learner

INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING

"Classroom-style, instructor-led training was effective because I was able to ask direct questions to the instructor."

Figure 3.

Top 10 Preferred Training Delivery Methods Across Common Training Topic Areas



Key Takeaways

Learners' preferred training method depends on the topic of the training.

Fortunately, numerous learning modalities, technologies and techniques are available to address the needs of the modern learner. Training professionals must consider learning choices when designing and delivering training. However, it's unrealistic to say every program should be individualized based on a single individual's preference.

One option that learning leaders are exercising is this notion of learner choice, found in the framework of the **modern learning system**. Administrators typically utilize a learning management system (LMS) or similar platform to house information that data can flow in and out of. The data collected from assessments or other established metrics looks for the need, or anticipated

need, for some sort of employee training. When training is needed, administrators can put learning paths in place to guide the training. Further, when these administrators can facilitate two or three delivery methods, such as eLearning or on-the-job coaching, learners can choose how they'd like to interact with the material. Each method offers a different learner experience that may be more or less appealing to the learner.

The next question, however, is which of these learning experiences are seen as more or less *effective* by learners? In the next section, we'll move beyond what's simply appealing and explore how learners see the outcomes that results from engaging with various formats of training.

Training professionals must consider learning choices when designing and delivering training.

WHAT DO LEARNERS THINK IS MOST EFFECTIVE?

Assuming that learners would choose training methods that work best for them, their choices can offer guidance on the methods that are most likely to be effective. On the other hand, if they've never experienced a particular method, they may not understand its potential. In these cases, their preferences may not reflect how they would actually respond to a training method. As such, affording learners a choice is a suitable option to allow them a "say" in how they receive training, but also so administrators can ensure the training is received in the most efficient way possible. In order to understand whether learners prefer the training methods that are most effective for them, we looked at how impactful they thought each method they'd recently experienced was.

TRAINING METHOD EFFECTIVENESS

Figure 4 on page 18 shows that in some cases, learners don't prefer the methods they think are most effective. While ILT was most often preferred by learners (see Figure 1), OJT was considered better for enhancing learning and OJC was preferred in nearly equal measure to ILT. Learners' explanations highlighted the important of applied practice for enhancing their learning.

Learners also tended to prefer the methods that were most familiar. For example, while fewer than 15% of learners indicated a preference for job aids, simulations or formal coaching, over 60% of those who'd experienced them recently felt they were very useful for enhancing their learning. Thus, another cause of differences in method preferences stems from learners' knowledge of and past experiences with those methods.



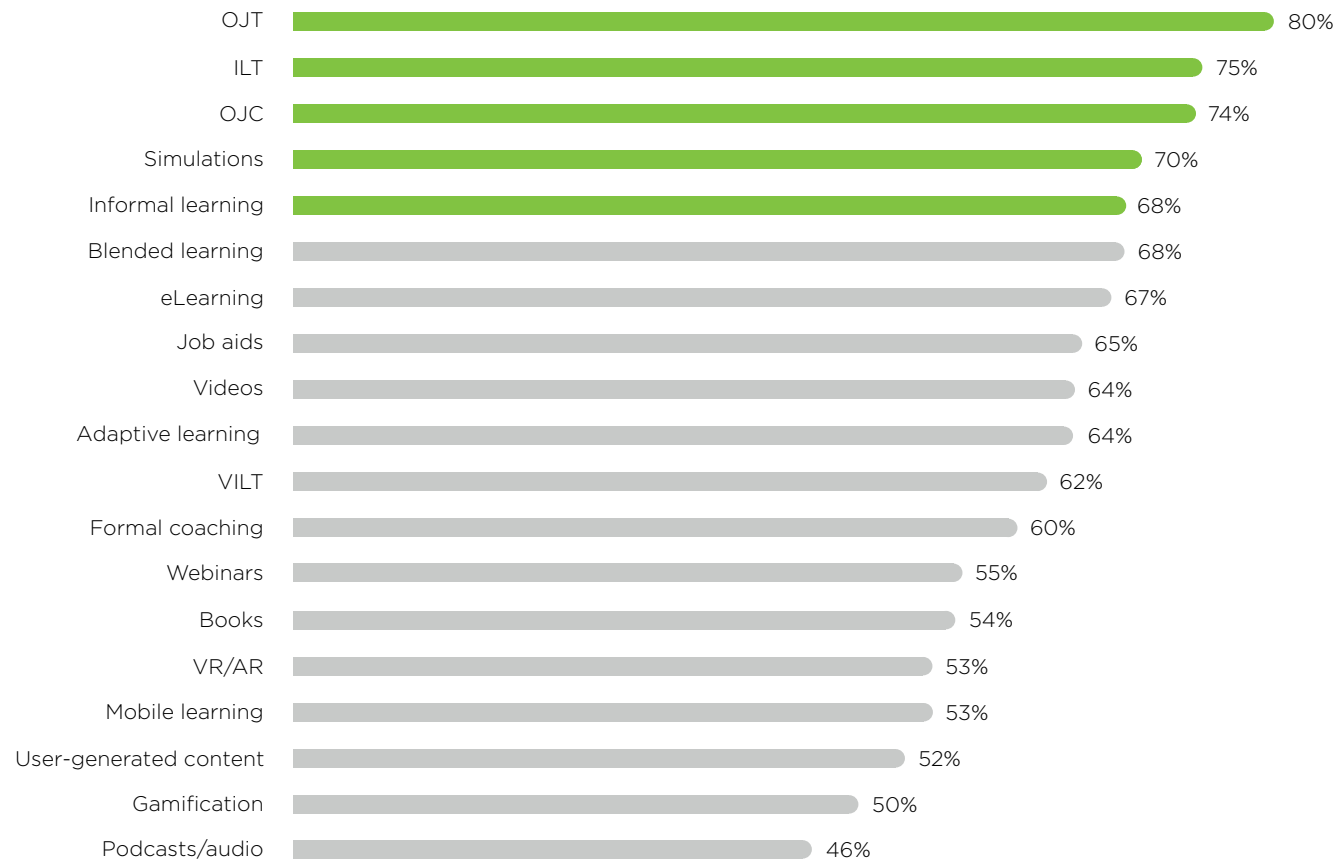
Voice of the Learner

ON-THE-JOB COACHING

"I went to a conference in which I took a few classes in leadership training specific to my field of work. The rest of my training has come from my supervisor's guidance on my leadership in the office with my team. Her continual feedback is more effective than a formal class, because I can apply it in the moment."

Figure 4.

Learners' Perceptions of the Impact of Each Training Method on Learning



The displayed percentages represent the proportion of respondents who rated their training as effective (4/5 on a 5-point scale).



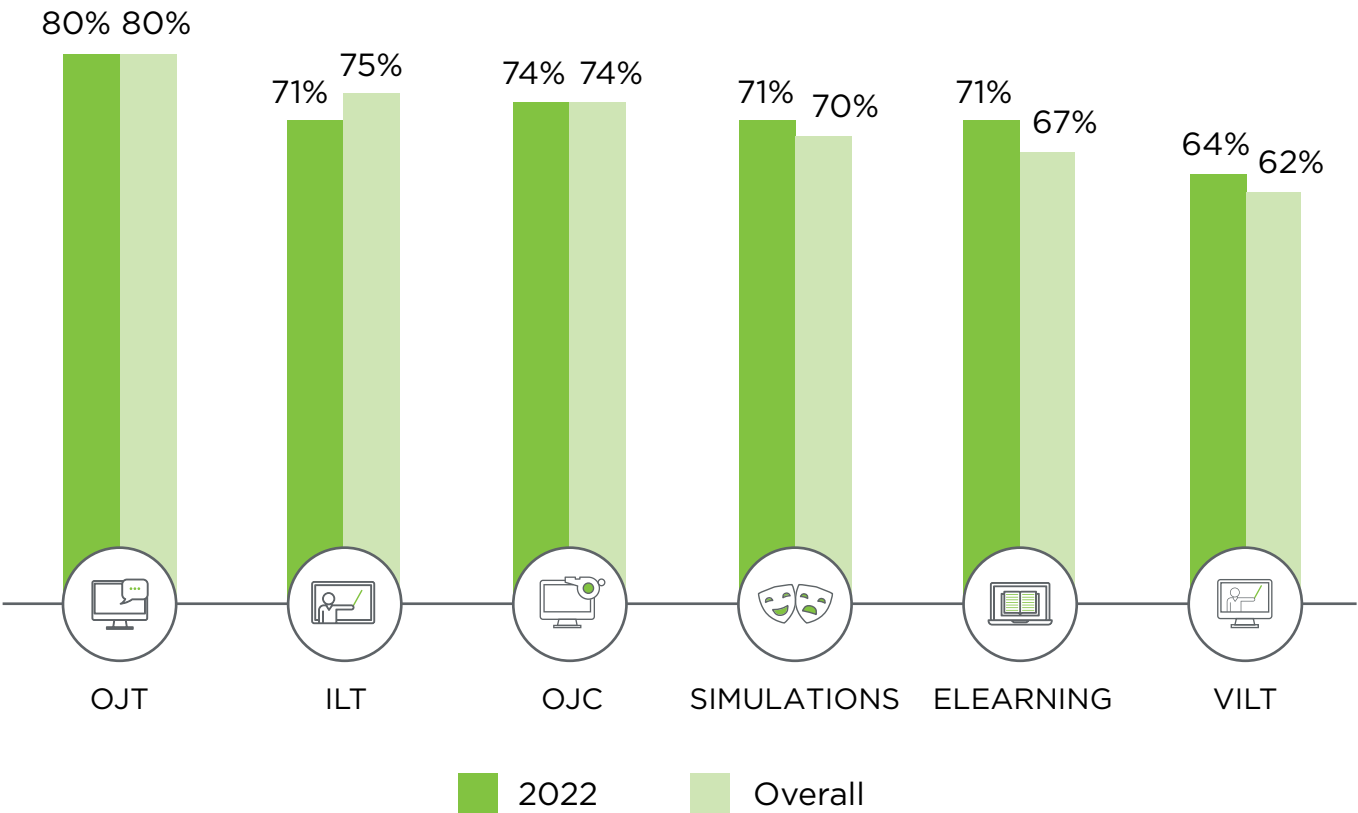
Key Takeaways

While ILT is most often preferred, learners believe on-the-job training is better for enhancing their learning.

To explore whether these effectiveness perceptions may have changed over time, we compared the overall averages with those from only our 2022 survey respondents, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows how views on effectiveness have evolved over the course of five years of data collection. As can be seen, OJT and OJC are still seen as highly impactful delivery methods. However, ILT has lost ground — in our 2022 data, it is seen as equally effective to eLearning and simulations by learners. This aligns with the shift seen in preferences in Figure 2 where forms of virtual learning, particularly VILT and eLearning, gained significant endorsement in our 2022 data compared to the overall preferences.

Figure 5.
Learners' Perceptions of the Impact of Each Training Method, 2022 Comparison





There are other notable changes as we look at the data across time. For instance, perceptions of the effectiveness of adaptive technologies rose significantly between 2017 and 2022, with only 36% of learners rating this modality effective in 2017, and 64% rating it effective in 2022. This finding suggests that for many learners, computer-based learning that adapts to performance is considered a normal part of the learning experience and

employees expect more and more customized content in their training programs.

At this point, we've discussed what learners prefer and what they see as effective when it comes to a training delivery modality. In the next section we'll cover the last major piece of this puzzle, which puts the prior results into context — namely, how is training for these learners actually getting delivered?

HOW ARE WE DELIVERING TRAINING?

The methods we use to deliver training depend on many factors. Methods vary based on the quantity and timing of resources that are required for their use, including those needed to develop, deliver and maintain content. Budget and resource restrictions can, therefore, place restraints on which methods are possible. The decision of which method to use must incorporate more than just learners' preferences. So, what modalities are we currently using to deliver training?



HOW ARE WE DELIVERING TRAINING?

TOP 3 METHODS



Over 1/2 used ILT



Over 1/3 used eLearning



1/3 used OJT

EMERGING METHODS



Fewer than 10% of learners have used:



Gamification



Blended learning



VR/AR



Adaptive learning



User-generated content

MULTIMODAL TRAINING



2/3 of learners have received training via multiple methods.



Key Takeaways

Over 1/2 of learners participated in ILT in the past year.

Figure 6.

Use of Training Methods Across All Training Topic Areas

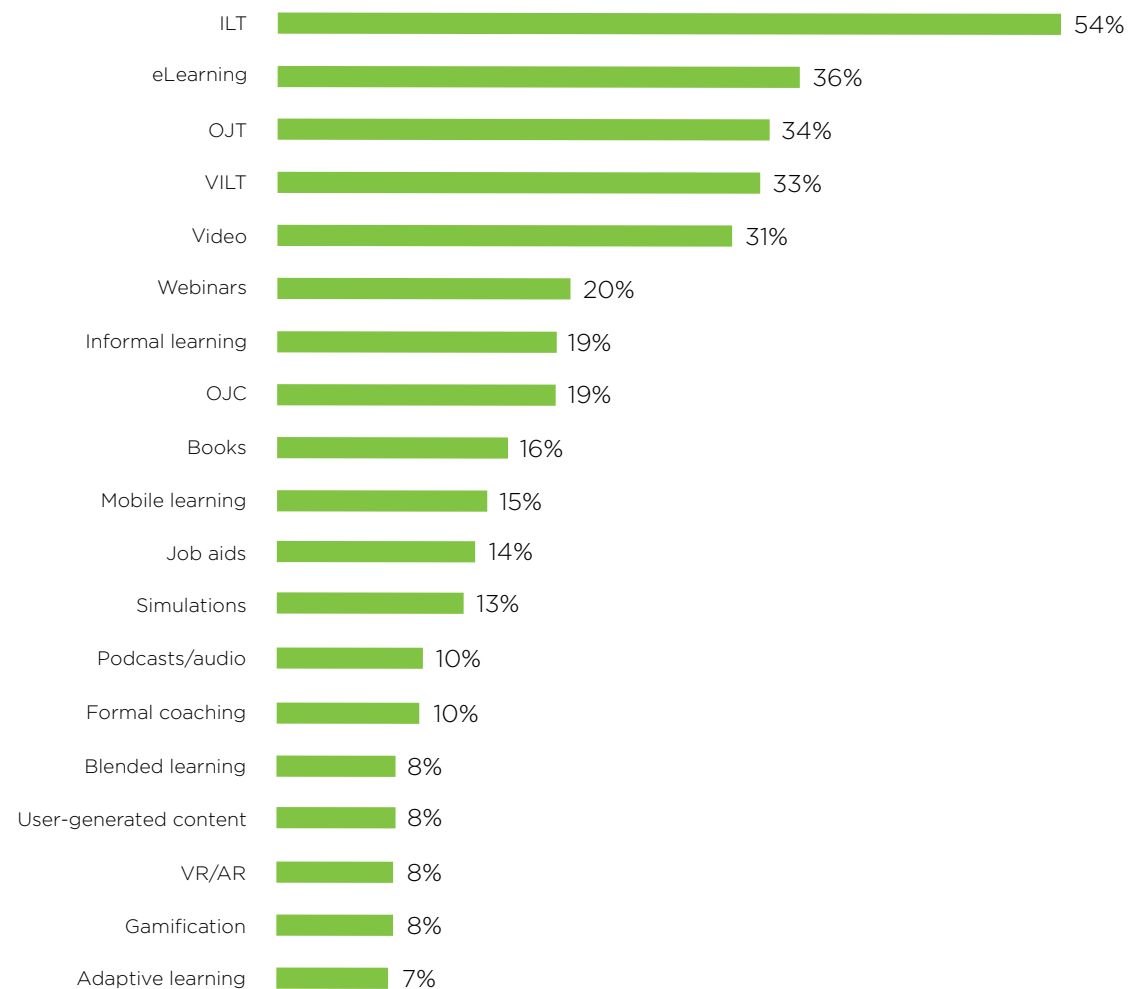




Figure 6 shows the typical strategies used to deliver training. ILT is by far the most common; over one-half of learners received ILT, which is a good sign, as ILT was their most preferred method. ILT's popularity may stem, in part, from its ability to remove learners from their regular work environments, which can be distracting or

make it difficult to focus on learning material. ILT also makes it possible to deliver content in one formal event, making it an easy and efficient technique for delivering learning. Other methods used include modalities that rely on on-the-job, experiential and informal social learning as well as virtual and web-based learning methods.

These modalities also align well with learners' preferences; the four methods that learners most prefer coincide with the top methods used. This is expected because these methods often provide content at the point of a learner's need, which may enhance their application on the job. At the bottom of the list, fewer learners have participated in training delivered via gamification, user-generated knowledge banks, virtual reality and adaptive learning.

Results also point to the use of multiple modalities (multimodal training) across training programs, as only 20% of our respondents said they only had training delivered to them in a single modality, whereas 66% of training programs are delivered using between two and four modalities. The prevalence of multimodal training is not surprising when you think

about how a single learning initiative within an organization can use more than one modality.

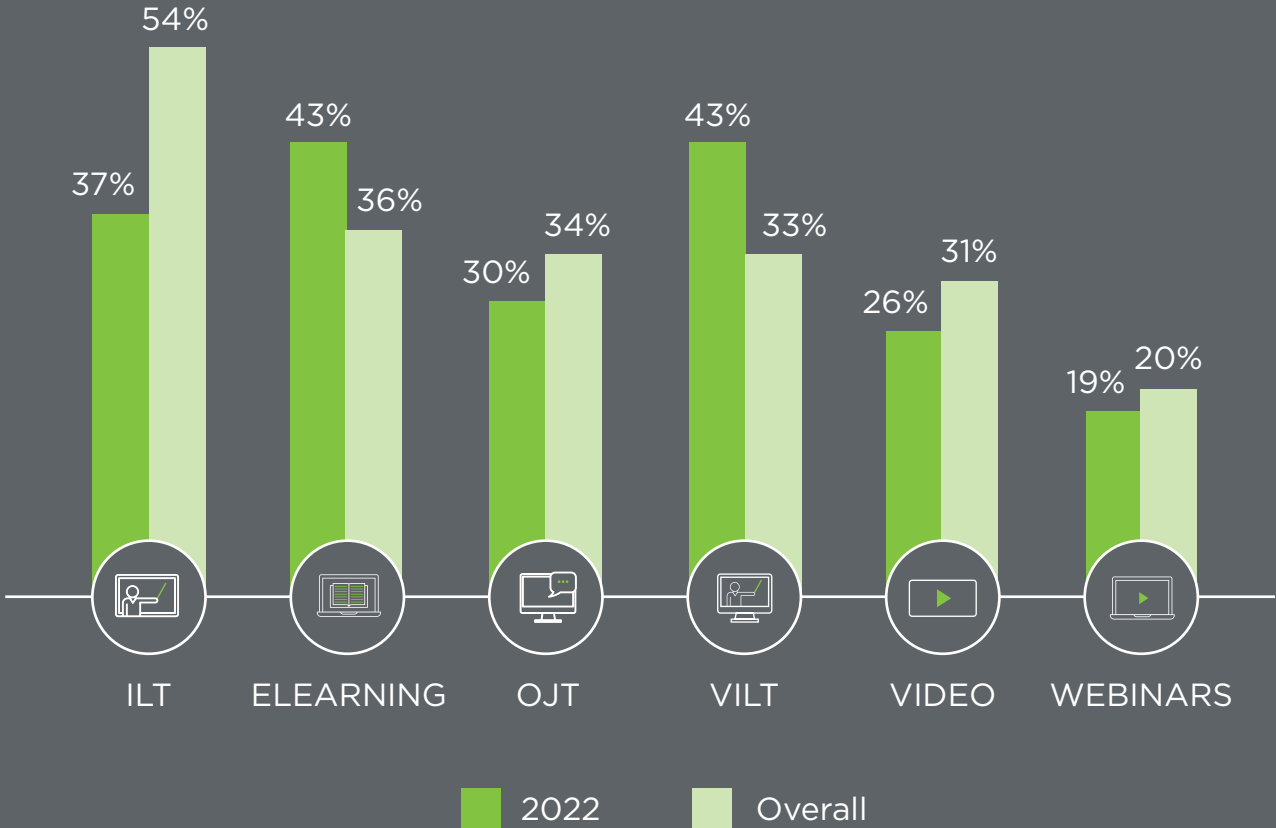
Consider new employee training, for example. An **onboarding** program might provide new employees with an employee manual and ask them to read it before coming to a classroom orientation. They could then interact with peers or their manager in a series of on-the-job training sessions. The program could further reinforce training by providing learners with access to a user-generated content repository, where they can ask questions, view answers to others' questions or post their own content. All of these strategies are methods for delivering content and enhancing learning, and each works together to meet learners where they are and at the time when they most need information.



As before, to examine whether trends in delivery have changed we compared the overall averages with those from only our 2022 survey respondents, as shown in Figure 7.

As can be seen in Figure 7, the story is much the same as with the previous comparisons presented in Figures 2 and 5 — that is, virtual formats such as eLearning and VILT are outpacing ILT. Of these comparisons, this one is perhaps least surprising, given that it reflects companies delivering training across industries whose operations may have been heavily influenced by COVID-19 precautions, thereby transferring learning activities away from what are usually environment-centric forms of training (e.g., ILT, OJT) to formats that enable distributed virtual learning.

Figure 7.
Learners' Top 6 Utilized Modalities Across All Training Topic Areas, 2022 Comparison



DELIVERY METHODS USED BY TRAINING TOPIC

Figure 8 on page 28 depicts differences in the methods used across six common training topic areas. The top five methods were the same for all training topics. As expected, ILT was the top modality used across nearly all training topics. On-the-job training was second for all topics except customer service and compliance training, illustrating the convenient, efficient nature of this method. Interestingly, video ranked third across all types

of training, likely due to its ability to augment other kinds of training and the ease with which it allows for both visual and verbal content delivery. Also of note is that both eLearning and VILT were within the top five methods used in each topic area. Again, their prevalence likely arises from their ability to provide learners with convenient access to training and from their ability to efficiently scale across a dispersed workforce.



Voice of the Learner

ELEARNING VERSUS ON-THE-JOB TECHNICAL TRAINING

eLearning: "The training was somewhat ineffective as it was all taught online. Parts were hard to understand, but there was no one available to seek clarification from."

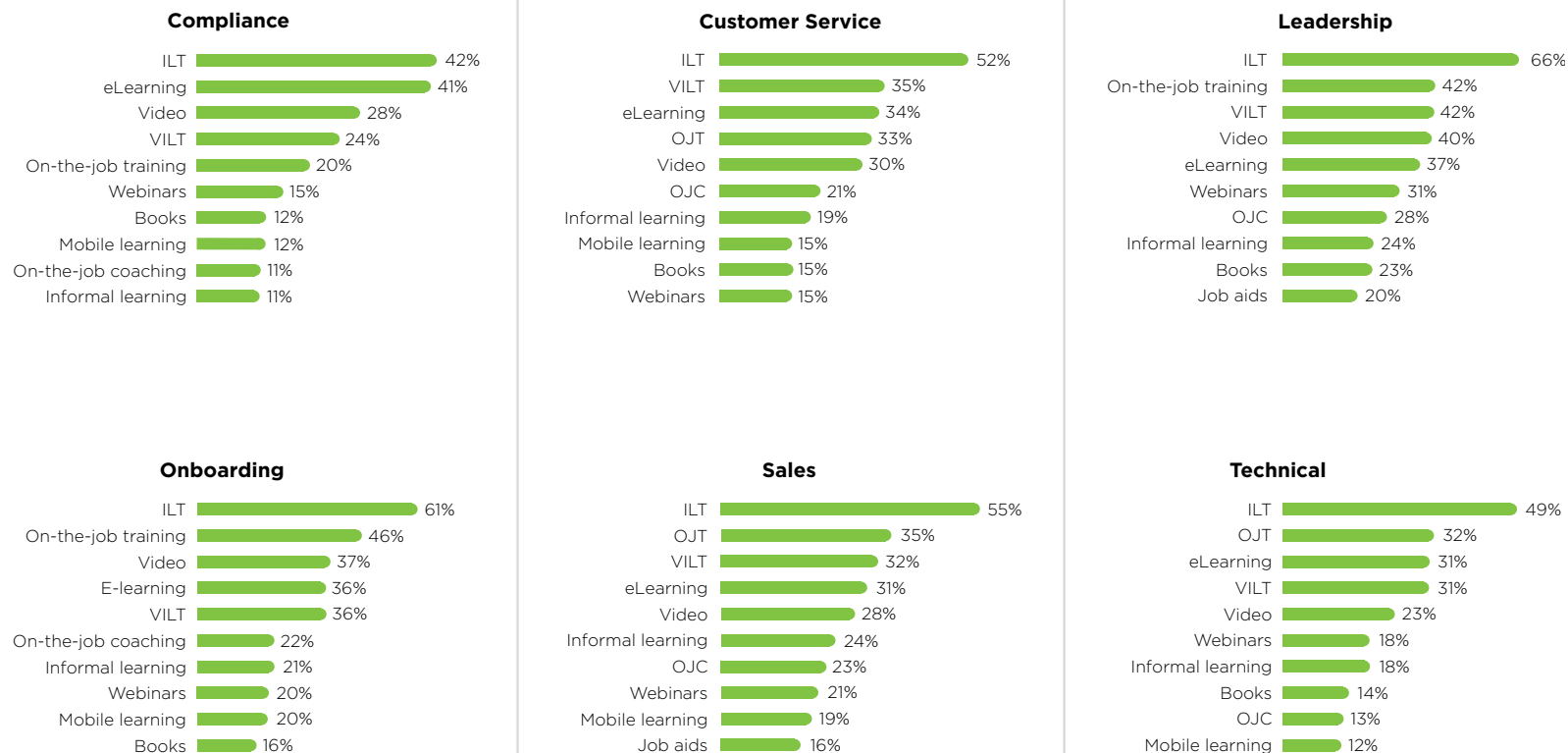
OJT: "On-the-job training was very helpful. I was able to ask all the questions I needed to ask without feeling silly because I didn't know something, and someone was there with me to correct my mistakes while I was learning."



Key Takeaways

The same five delivery methods were the most commonly used across all training topics.

Figure 8.
Top 10 Utilized Training Delivery Methods Across Common Training Topic Areas



DO LEARNER CHOICES MATTER?

Our research shows that L&D efforts are generally aligned with learner preferences; the majority of learners experienced at least one of their preferred training methods. If giving employees what they want improves their learning, it should also improve training outcomes.

In our data, we found that when training is seen as more effective, it's positively related to the attitudes of learners when it comes to:

- Work clarity.
- Job satisfaction.
- Work centrality.
- Perception of supervisor support.



IMPACT OF USING PREFERRED TRAINING METHODS

So far, our findings provide support for the importance of aligning learner choices with the training methods being used. But is there more to the story?

For this portion of our analysis, we created a regression model to explore what might predict effective learning. The largest driver of training effectiveness was whether or not it was provided through at least one preferred modality. Other outcomes were also impacted: When learners were trained through their preferred methods, they reported that their work requirements were clear, that work was an important

part of their lives and that they felt a proper balance between their work and personal lives.

In addition, the number of training methods used to deliver a specific program improved the learner's perception of training effectiveness. The more methods through which an organization delivered training, the more likely the training was to be seen as effective. This outcome can likely be attributed to the increased likelihood of addressing learners' choices when multiple methods are used.

Training programs delivered through at least one preferred method are about 50% more likely to be considered effective. By providing training through multiple methods, we're more likely to address learner preferences and increase training effectiveness. Providing training in ways that learners want to learn can have cascading positive effects, improving their work lives and business outcomes.

Interestingly, using certain methods tended to result in higher perceived effectiveness, regardless of whether a learner preferred them. These methods include mobile learning, formal coaching and job aids. Each has the potential to provide just-in-time content and address learners' needs as they occur. In contrast, the positive

impact of using ILT depends on learners' preference for it; when learners preferred ILT, it was more likely to be effective.

Lastly, the most crucial yardstick for L&D functions is the positive impact of effective training. Learners who felt their training was effective reported being more satisfied with their jobs, clearer about their work requirements and more supported by their supervisors, and they considered their job to be a more important part of their lives. Thus, by providing training through multiple delivery methods and permitting learners to choose, L&D has the potential to create considerable ripple effects throughout employees' work experiences that provide value to the organization in multiple ways beyond learning.



RECOMMENDATIONS

This research focused on four main questions: What do learners want? What do they see as effective? Are we letting them make those choices? And how do the answers to those questions impact training outcomes? Based on what we found, several recommendations for L&D practices are summarized on the following pages.

CONCLUSIONS

1

Do preferences impact training outcomes? Yes.

Training programs delivered through at least one preferred method were more likely to be considered effective. This effectiveness, in turn, increased learners' job satisfaction, work clarity, work-life balance, perceived supervisor support and emphasis on work as an important part of their lives.

2

What do learners want? It depends.

Learners prefer different methods depending on the type of training they are receiving, the complexity of their jobs and their previous experience with various training methods. However, the majority of learners expressed a clear preference for at least one of three kinds of training: instructor-led training, on-the-job training and eLearning.

3

Are we giving them what they want? For the most part.

The vast majority of learners received training through at least one preferred modality, though their organizations were less likely to address certain preferences (e.g., preference for virtual reality training). Learners were more likely to have their preferences met when multiple methods were used to deliver training.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Where possible, train employees using at least one of their preferred methods. By doing so, you can improve the impact of training on employees' lives and business outcomes.



2. Consider the topic and the type of work that learners do when choosing a training method. If you're unsure of the best method, choose ILT, on-the-job training and/or eLearning in order to address as many learners' preferences as possible.

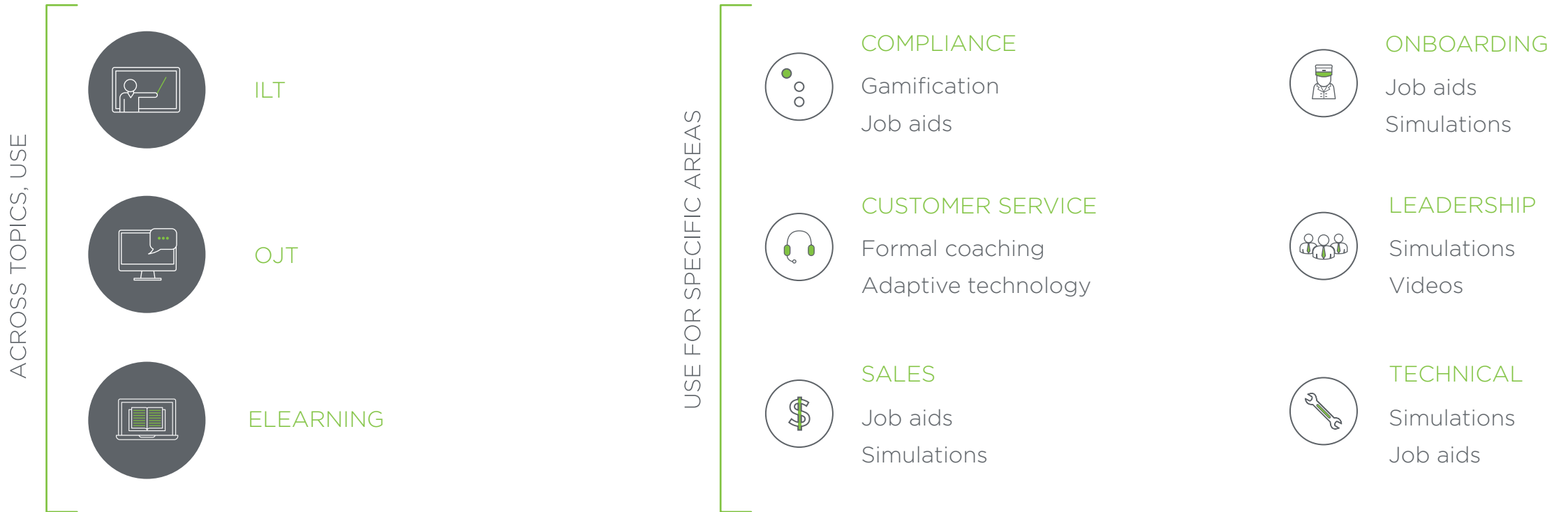


3. Use multiple methods to deliver training whenever possible to increase the likelihood of addressing learners' preferences, and try to pair **asynchronous** modalities with at least one **synchronous** modality when possible and appropriate.



WHICH METHODS ARE BEST SUITED FOR EACH TOPIC?

Learners generally agreed that instructor-led training, on-the-job training and eLearning were most impactful. Other methods that learners identified as effective varied by topic.





CONCLUSION

There are many methods, or modalities, available for delivering training. Each offers different features that you should consider when determining which to use. These features also make them more (or less) appealing to learners. Modern learning systems incorporate both informal and formal mechanisms in order to meet the needs of learners

throughout their careers. Delivery methods differ in where they fall on the formality continuum. Some modalities prescribe strict learning activities and pathways, while others enable organic and informal learning.

For example, webinars are relatively formal; they present information to

learners in a predetermined order. User-generated knowledge banks, on the other hand, are less formal. These information repositories allow learners to search for information, respond to posts from others and create their own posts. In this way, learners are able to make choices about what is most relevant and useful for them.

Modalities also differ in the way learners access and consume content. Some training modalities, such as job aids, make content readily accessible at the time and location that learners need it, whereas others, such as ILT, require access at predefined times or locations. The frequencies and patterns with which learners consume content can vary from one-time events to multiple sessions and can be self-paced or predetermined.

We know that learners have options in the way they learn — if they don't like the way training is delivered, they can access information in other ways (e.g., Google and YouTube), where they run the risk of misinformation. We must empower their access to training content by making it available through multiple methods and choosing the ones with which they are most likely to engage. In doing so, we can increase the likelihood of meeting their needs and, ultimately, improve business outcomes.



TRAINING DELIVERY TOOLBOX

There are many methods, or modalities, available for delivering training. Each offers different features that you should consider when determining which to use. These features also make them more (or less) appealing to learners.



INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (ILT)
Classroom-based training facilitated by an instructor



VIRTUAL INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (VILT)
Online training facilitated by an instructor



ELEARNING
Online learning, typically delivered as a self-paced course



MOBILE LEARNING
Learning that occurs on a mobile device, such as a smartphone or a tablet



INFORMAL SOCIAL LEARNING
Learning that occurs through interactions with subordinates, co-workers, supervisors and other individuals



ON-THE-JOB TRAINING (OJT)
Learning that occurs while working, typically through supervision of a manager, coach or mentor



ON-THE-JOB COACHING (OJC)
Personalized guidance and direction provided via one-on-one interaction at work, during the workday, and typically by a manager or a peer, often centered around specific situations or short-term goals



FORMAL COACHING
Personalized guidance and direction provided via one-on-one interaction with a professional, often an external consultant, and typically with a broad, long-term career development focus



USER-GENERATED KNOWLEDGE BANK
Learning through information posted by others to company forums, knowledge bases or social media



VIDEO
Content delivered via pre-recorded videos; often paired with another type of delivery method, such as eLearning or ILT



PODCASTS
Content delivered via pre-recorded audio files; often paired with another type of delivery method, such as eLearning or ILT



WEBINARS
A live online learning event, shorter in duration than a course



BOOKS
Content delivered via printed or online written materials



JOB AIDS
Performance support tools or devices that allow easy access to the information needed to perform a task



SIMULATION
Practice within the context of a real-world scenario



VIRTUAL REALITY AND AUGMENTED REALITY
Learning through interaction within a three-dimensional virtual environment that mimics reality (VR) and/or enhances reality by providing digital information that overlays what learners already see (AR)















GAMIFICATION
The application of gaming designs and principles to learning or training to make them more engaging and entertaining



ADAPTIVE LEARNING
Content personalized for the learner using technology

LEARNER EXPERIENCE

	FORMALITY	ACCESS	CONSUMPTION		FORMALITY	ACCESS	CONSUMPTION
	High	Predetermined time and location	Event based		Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced
	High	Predetermined time	Event based		Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced
	Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced		High	Predetermined time	Event based
	Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced		Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced
	Low	Learner driven	As needed		Moderate	Learner driven	As needed
	Moderate	Predetermined location	Variable		High	Variable	Variable
	Moderate	Predetermined location	Variable		High	Variable	Variable
	High	Predetermined time and place	Prescribed		Moderate	Variable	Variable
	Moderate	Learner driven	Self-paced		Moderate	Learner driven	Variable

Note. This list is not intended to be exhaustive but instead to cover the most common delivery methods. Attributes describe the typical form of each, though there are exceptions.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

All research findings described within this report are based on Training Industry, Inc. research data collected in 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2022. Combined, these samples totaled 1,501 learners who had participated in training within the past year prior to completing the survey. The organizations these respondents represent varied in terms of size and industry to ensure a full picture of the learner experience across a broad spectrum of organizations and roles.

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS

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