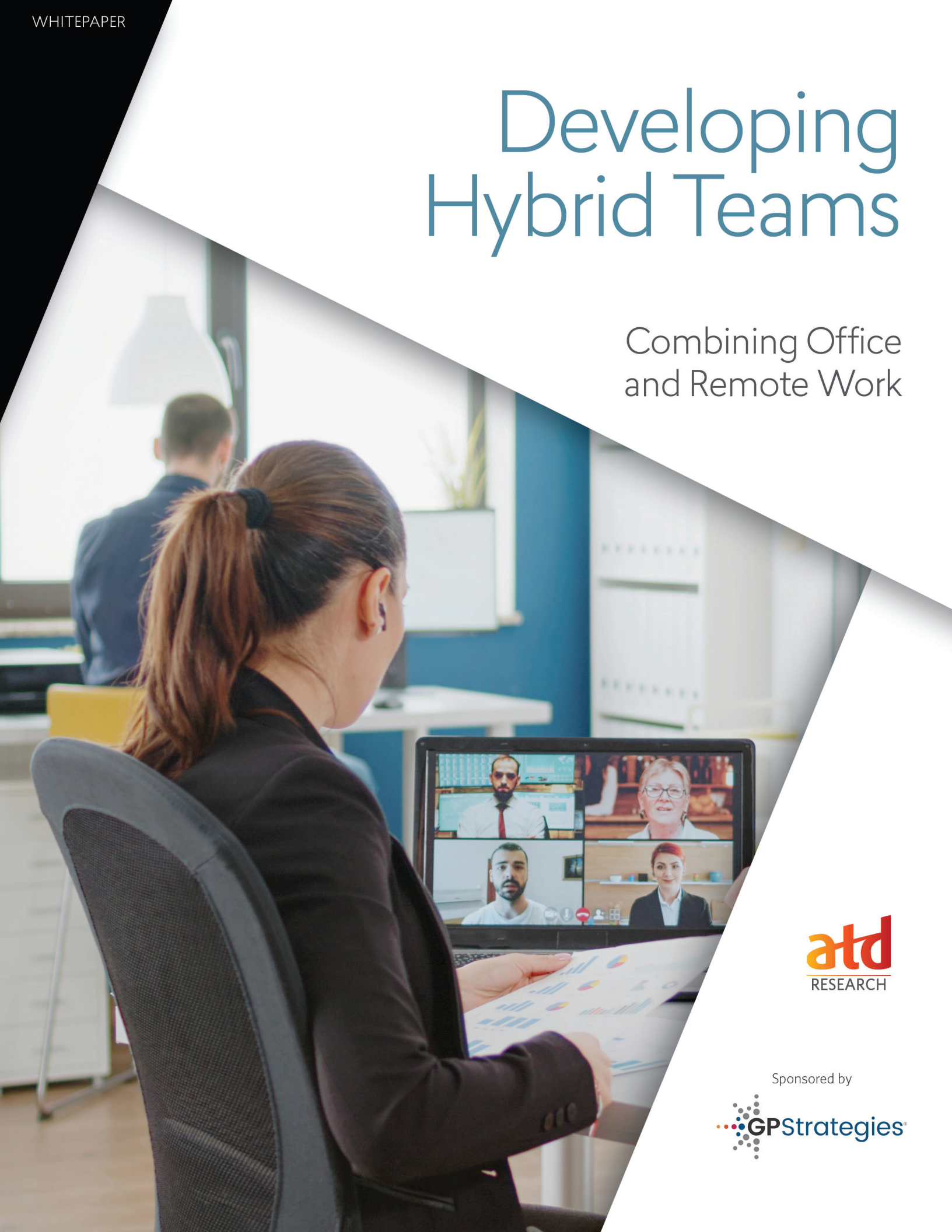


# Developing Hybrid Teams

Combining Office and Remote Work



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## **Survey Overview**

### **Target Survey Population**

The target population for this research was talent development professionals across different organizations and industries. Participants from 133 unique organizations with hybrid teams completed the survey.

### **Survey Instrument**

The survey was composed of 31 questions including those related to the demographics of the respondents.

### **Procedure**

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey to the target population in December 2021. The survey closed in January 2022.

# About the Sponsor



## A Note From GP Strategies

The explosion of hybrid work has moved what was once an employee accommodation to a purposeful, strategic, company-wide approach. However, a hybrid workforce has challenges—real and perceived. There are concerns about how employees will continue to collaborate and innovate if they are not together. There is a heightened awareness of digital fatigue and personal well-being while others wonder if productivity and effectiveness can be sustained. Business leaders worry that the organization’s culture will suffer if employees are physically scattered.

While leaders need to understand the lived reality of each member of their team, they also need to be mindful of how to drive team performance as a whole. The same critical elements of an in-person team create a strong, high-performing hybrid team: building trust, creating connection, seeking alignment, and driving results. What’s different is the context in which these elements are applied and, as a result, the nuances of application.

GP Strategies is proud to support ATD in leading this research on building hybrid teams. We believe that the impact of the hybrid work explosion will reverberate for many years. We also believe the organizations that embrace hybrid and plan for it thoughtfully will be ahead of the game in terms of long-term viability. They will be successful in achieving their goals and fostering an environment where people want to come to work each day, no matter where they do their work.

## About GP Strategies

GP Strategies is a leading workforce transformation partner—a truly dedicated global provider serving 25 percent of the Global 500 and delivering custom learning solutions from the front line to the C-suite. We’re at our best when driving innovation—integrating leading technologies, developing new learning paradigms, and instituting fresh business processes and measurement approaches.

This innovation and transformation focus, combined with deep listening, workforce expertise, and customer-centricity, delivers superior business and operational results. Whether your transformation requires a change in employee performance and mindsets, integrating a framework for hybrid teams to be successful, implementation of learning technologies, or refinement of critical processes, GP Strategies is a transformation partner you can trust. To learn more, visit [gpstrategies.com](https://gpstrategies.com).

# Executive Summary

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in early 2020, many employees who could perform their jobs (or parts of their jobs) from home began working remotely either all or some of the time. Now, in 2022, leaders are looking ahead and trying to imagine what the post-pandemic workplace will look like. Many expect a hybrid workplace to emerge. According to a McKinsey and Company survey of 100 executives, nine out of 10 organizations planned to combine in-person and remote working in the future. However, most didn't yet have a detailed plan for hybrid work.<sup>1</sup>

To help organizations better understand the landscape of hybrid teams and best practices, this report takes a close look at organizations that currently have hybrid teams in place. The research, which draws on a survey of 133 organizations with hybrid teams, delivers benchmarking data on the current and expected future state of hybrid teams and highlights best practices associated with better organizational performance.

A **hybrid team** is one where a manager oversees employees who work from a central office or location as well as employees who work remotely at another location (for example, a home office or in the field).

A hybrid team can also include employees who rotate between being in the central office or location and another location (for example, employees who work in the central office three days a week and remotely two days a week).

At the average participating organization, 69 percent of managers oversaw hybrid teams. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, this figure was only 20 percent. In particular, the number of employees who rotate between a central office and another location rose dramatically.

This change appears to be here to remain—a large majority of participants expected the number of hybrid teams in their organization to either remain the same or increase in the next five years.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Alexander, Rich Cracknell, Aaron De Smet, Meredith Langstaff, Mihir Mysore, and Dan Ravid, "What Executives Are Saying About the Future of Hybrid Work," McKinsey and Company, May 17, 2021, [mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work](https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work).

Among the survey participants, 23 percent were considered high performers. These organizations were performing well across several key business areas and had talent development functions that made strong contributions to that performance. The research identified practices related to hybrid teams with statistically significant connections to high performance. For example, organizations that provided hybrid team managers with hybrid team manager training (either through assets specifically for hybrid managers or a combination of assets on virtual management and traditional management) were more likely to be high performers.

At the mean organization, 69 percent of managers oversaw hybrid teams. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, this figure was only 20 percent.

Employees who work on hybrid teams benefited from training as well, particularly in collaboration and communication in hybrid settings. Organizations must also ensure that they provide hybrid teams with the technology they need to succeed in a hybrid work environment. Of concern, about a quarter of organizations still do not provide employees with virtual meeting room software. Virtual meeting rooms can improve teamwork, engagement, and productivity for virtual teams while creating an even playing field for in-office and remote team members. Organizations that lacked this key technology performed significantly worse.

### Defining High Performers

This report identifies practices associated with being a high performer. Organizations were considered to be high performers if they met two criteria:

- They were performing as well as or better than their competitors in financial performance, customer and client satisfaction, employee engagement, and growth potential for the next five years.
- Their talent development functions helped them achieve their business goals to a high extent.

*Developing Hybrid Teams: Combining Office and Remote Work* takes a closer look at hybrid teams and their growth. It also looks at factors such as who determines where employees on hybrid teams work, expectations for regular in-person meetings of team members at central locations, and the tools organizations provide to support hybrid teams. It also looks at training for hybrid team managers and employees. To supplement the data, this report includes examples and insights from leading companies and subject matter experts.

# Whitepaper

This section shares key information about research participants, including demographics. It also discusses the top motivators and barriers related to expanding the use of hybrid teams. Finally, it shares key findings from the research.

## About the Participants

ATD Research surveyed 133 talent development professionals at organizations with hybrid teams. Of these, 88 percent were managers or above.

Slightly over a third of respondents (35 percent) represented small organizations with fewer than 500 employees, and 45 percent were from medium-sized organizations employing between 500 and 9,999 employees. The remaining 20 percent of respondents were from large organizations with 10,000 or more employees.

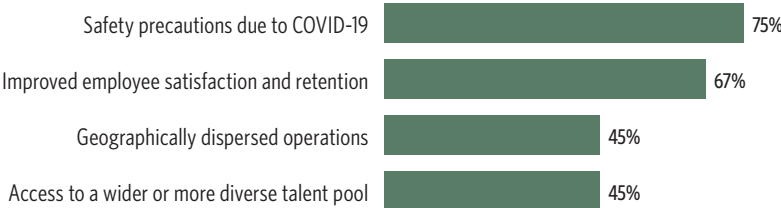
Among participating organizations, 23 percent were high performers. This distinction means they were performing well across several key business areas (financial performance, customer and client satisfaction, employee engagement, and growth potential for the next five years) and had talent development functions that made strong contributions to that performance. The remaining 77 percent did not meet these criteria.

## Drivers for Using Hybrid Teams

To understand what drives the use of hybrid teams, ATD asked participants why their organization had chosen to incorporate hybrid teams over fully traditional or fully remote teams. As Figure 1 illustrates, the most common response by far was safety precautions

**FIGURE 1**  
Top Drivers

*In situations where your organization chooses to use a hybrid team over a fully traditional or fully remote team, what are the most common reasons? (Choose all that apply.)*



*(Only the top four responses are shown.)*

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was selected by 75 percent of respondents. Another 67 percent named improved employee satisfaction and retention. Slightly less than half mentioned geographically dispersed operations and the ability to access a wider or more diverse talent pool.

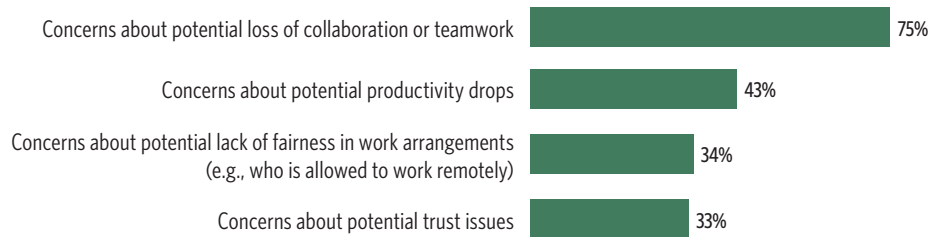
## Challenges With Hybrid Teams

ATD also sought to identify what challenges might prevent organizations from adding hybrid teams. The top barrier, cited by 75 percent of respondents, was concerns about a potential loss of collaboration or teamwork (Figure 2). The second biggest barrier to hybrid teams, according to 43 percent of participants, was concerns about potential productivity drops. This report looks more closely at these challenges and discusses how organizations can overcome these barriers in a later section.

**FIGURE 2**

### Top Barriers

*What are the top barriers your organization faces to expanding the number of hybrid teams? (Choose all that apply.)*



*(Only the top four responses are shown.)*

## Key Findings

Several key findings emerged from this research:

- The top driver of hybrid team use was the COVID-19 pandemic. This was supported by the fact that before the COVID-19 pandemic, only 20 percent of managers oversaw a hybrid team at the average organization. Today, the number is 69 percent. At the mean organization, about a third of employees fell into each category: workers who were fully in the office, workers who were fully remote, and workers who rotated between the office and another location.
- However, hybrid team use was expected to continue in the post-pandemic future. Among participating organizations, 47 percent expected their use of hybrid teams to stay the same five years from now, while 34 percent expected an increase and 19 percent expected a decrease.



- Providing teams with basic tools to succeed in the virtual environment is crucial. About a quarter of organizations did not provide employees with virtual meeting room software and those organizations were less likely to be high performers.
- Organizations that provided hybrid team managers with manager training that covered both traditional and virtual employees (either in the form of assets specifically for hybrid managers or as a combination of virtual management and traditional management assets) were more likely to be high performers. Training for managers on team building in a hybrid setting was associated with better organizational performance, which is consistent with the finding that the biggest skills gap for hybrid team managers was in team building.
- Training employees in hybrid teams on how to collaborate and communicate in a hybrid setting was associated with a higher likelihood of being a high performer, as was training on how to leverage technology tools to work more effectively in a hybrid setting.

### Identifying Statistically Significant Differences

This report often notes whether the differences between two groups is significant at a level of  $p < 0.05$ . A significance of  $p < 0.05$  implies a less than 5 percent probability that the difference was a result of chance, and one can be 95 percent confident that the results represent a statistically significant relationship.

# Action Plan

There is no question that the number of hybrid teams has expanded rapidly, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, hybrid teams also appear to be here to stay, with more than 75 percent of organizations expecting the number of hybrid teams to stay the same or increase in a five-year horizon. Therefore, it's critical that organizations position their hybrid teams for continued success.

ATD asked organizations about their use of hybrid teams and how they ensured that their managers and staff had the skills necessary to thrive and deliver positive business results in a hybrid team environment. Based on this data, this report makes several recommendations.

## **Keep Asking Questions and Remain Flexible**

The pace of growth of hybrid teams has been astounding. Before the pandemic, only about one in five managers oversaw a hybrid team. Now, that number is more than three in five. In particular, rotating arrangements, where an employee rotates between a central office or location and another location on a regular basis (or is required to come into the central office or location for a minimum number of days but can work from another location the rest of the time) were rare before COVID-19, with only 7 percent of employees using them. Now, the number is 35 percent.

As a result of this growth, policies regarding hybrid teams and rotating arrangements (such as policies dictating in-person meeting requirements and who determines where an employee works) tend to be extremely new at most organizations and are subject to change. More research is needed to determine how these policies will impact employees and their organizations. Therefore, organizations should keep following current news and research as well as monitor employee feedback and be flexible to changing their policies. Organizations should also consider how changing business and talent needs may necessitate changes in policies.

## **Don't Leave Teams to Figure Out Technology on Their Own**

Organizations that provided hybrid teams with virtual meeting room software were much more likely to be high performers than organizations that did not provide this tool. Leaders should take care when selecting meeting room software and should regularly review their software choices to ensure they continue to meet user and business needs. In the report *Learning Technology Ecosystems: Tools, Platforms, and Strategies*, ATD's researchers found that it's beneficial to review technologies, including virtual meeting room software, at least annually. Reviewers should ask users (in this case, hybrid team managers and

employees) what works well, what does not, and what can be improved. When selecting software, the most popular places to start doing market research were online reviews, conferences, and product demonstrations.<sup>2</sup>

However, success doesn't end with selecting and reviewing technology. Organizations that provided training on how to use technology tools such as virtual meeting software were more likely to be high performers. Employees should know how and when to leverage various features (such as chat, hand-raising prompts, whiteboards, live reactions, and breakout rooms) to improve engagement, collaboration, and productivity and ensure that both their in-office and remote colleagues feel included.

### **Focus on Team Building Skills**

The biggest barrier to expanding hybrid teams was concerns about the loss of teamwork and collaboration, and the capability hybrid team managers struggled the most with was team building. However, organizations can overcome these challenges through targeted training. When providing managers with training on building teams in a hybrid setting and providing employees with training on how to collaborate in a hybrid setting, organizations were more likely to be high performers.

One way to develop team building skills in a hybrid setting is to use simulations and scenarios; use of simulations and scenarios in training is a high-performance practice, according to previous research by ATD.<sup>3</sup> For example, ask hybrid team members to collaborate on solving a fictional business challenge using the same software tools—such as online meeting rooms, chat, and project management tools—that are normally available to them. Consider recording their online meeting room sessions, interviewing team members after the exercise, and providing individualized feedback to managers and individuals on how they can improve collaboration.

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2 ATD, *Learning Technology Ecosystems: Tools, Platforms, and Strategies* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2021).

3 ATD, *Simulations and Scenarios*.

# About the Author and Contributors

**atd** The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries. Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace. Learn more at [td.org](http://td.org).

The resources we provide to help talent development professionals increase their impact and effectiveness include our research. ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.



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# More From ATD Research

## 2022 State of Finance Training



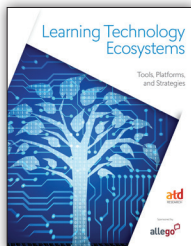
The *2022 State of Finance Training* provides a detailed view of training in finance, sharing metrics such as learning expenditure and the average number of hours employees use on learning annually. To identify how responses differed among distinct types of financial organizations, ATD reports data for three separate groups: the consolidated financial group, banks, and credit unions. To learn more, visit [td.org/StateOfFinance](https://td.org/StateOfFinance).

## 2021 State of the Industry



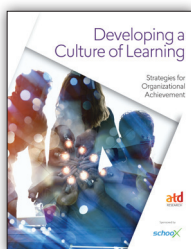
The *2021 State of the Industry* report, sponsored by Allego and AllenComm, is ATD's annual review of talent development trends, spending, and activities that can help benchmark your team's work. Drawing upon ATD's 2021 survey, which gathered information from 223 organizations across a diverse range of industries, company sizes, and locations, this year's report presents results in a robust, data-driven guide to demonstrate what has happened in talent development in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, visit [td.org/SOIR2021](https://td.org/SOIR2021).

## Learning Technology Ecosystems



This report represents ATD's first research on complete learning technology ecosystems. A learning technology ecosystem was defined as the tools and platforms an organization uses to create, deliver, manage, and analyze its learning content. It also includes the people and processes for enabling those tools and platforms. The report identifies practices related to learning technology ecosystems with statistically significant connections to high performance. [td.org/LTEcosystems](https://td.org/LTEcosystems).

## Developing a Culture of Learning: Strategies for Organizational Achievement



Researchers from the Association for Talent Development (ATD) have previously found that organizations with learning cultures were far more likely to realize positive business results. This report provides an updated look (from 2021) at these issues, delivers benchmarking data, and highlights best practices. For more information, visit [td.org/COL](https://td.org/COL).

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