

COVID-19 Pandemic Created Changes and Challenges to Workplace Learning

ATD's State of the Industry report shows a substantial increase in virtual classroom training and e-learning.

(Alexandria, VA) December 8, 2021—The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way employee learning was delivered in 2020 and led to a 3.1 percent decrease in the average organization's spending on employee learning, according to the Association for Talent Development's [2021 State of the Industry](#) report.

The annual report, which is sponsored this year by [AllenComm](#) and [Allego](#), also highlighted organizations' commitment to on-the-job learning experiences. Despite the challenges created by the pandemic, on-the-job learning increased in 2020, with 62 percent of organizations emphasizing it to a high or very high extent. Examples of on-the-job learning include knowledge sharing and coaching. These can be done either in person or with the aid of technology.

The average organization's direct learning expenditure decreased to \$1,267 in 2020, down from \$1,308 per worker in 2019 and \$1,299 in 2018. The global economy contracted by 3.2 percent (in other words, growth was negative) according to the International Monetary Fund. The drop in learning spending reflects overall drops in the economy.

"We see from the report that the average hour of learning that was available (created) and used was less expensive," said Maria Ho, associate director of ATD Research. "Organizations likely reduced the cost per hour available (and used) by reducing overhead costs such as the cost of classrooms or instructor travel. A large amount of in-person training was displaced by virtual classroom training and e-learning in 2020."

At the average organization, each worker used 35 hours of formal learning in 2020. The hours used per employee were slightly higher than those seen in the last few years and each hour was slightly less expensive than in 2019.

With some workplaces closed and employees in telework-ready roles, virtual learning became the norm. In-person classroom learning hours dropped from 40 percent of learning hours in 2019 to 16 percent in 2020. Virtual classroom learning (which connects instructors and learners in real-time with the aid of technology) made up 35 percent of learning in 2020, up from 19 percent in 2019. According to ATD's [Virtual Classrooms: Leveraging Technology for Impact](#) research report, talent development professionals expect virtual classroom use to continue to expand in the future.

Other key findings from the report include:

- Self-paced online delivery (e-learning) accounted for 32 percent of hours used, up from 26 percent in 2019. This report found that 97 percent of organizations used e-learning in 2020.
- Mandatory and compliance training made up 14 percent of learning in 2020, followed by managerial and supervisory content (13 percent).

A [free webinar](#) about the results of the report will take place December 7 at 3 p.m. ET.

About ATD

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) is the world's largest professional membership organization supporting those who develop the knowledge and skills of employees, improve performance, and help to achieve results for the organizations they serve. Established in 1943, the association was previously known as the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD).

ATD's members come from more than 120 countries and work in public and private organizations in every industry sector. ATD supports talent development professionals who gather locally in volunteer-led US chapters and international member networks and with international strategic partners.

For more information, visit [td.org](https://www.td.org).