

Cycling through the 21st Century Career: Putting Learning in its Rightful Place

Learning is in desperate need of prioritization as global economies grapple with the pressure of reskilling workforces. But most knowledge workers lack employer support to shift into a continuous learning mindset, according to our recent study. A brand-new career model that values learning and work equally will usher in a new era of work fit for the 21st century.



Executive Summary

The worker's relationship with learning is broken.

Until we enter the workforce, learning is integrated into everything we do. At school, the pupil's homework is learning. At university, the student's coursework is learning. But in the office, the worker's work has nothing to do with learning at all.

With fast-changing skills and longer career spans, however, learning today should be considered just as important as work itself. As a well-known World Economic Forum report points out, more than 35% of important job skills will change between 2016 and 2020, and this pace won't slow down any time soon.¹ What's more, careers are extending as expected lifespans rise, resulting in an even greater need for a continuous skills refresh. Learning is the fuel for modern work and fulfilling careers that stand the test of time.

To better understand the barriers hindering adoption of a continuous learning mindset, we conducted a study of 1,000 knowledge workers across Europe. While the study was Europe-centric, our findings are relevant to workplaces globally (see methodology, page 28). As it turns out, a predominant issue with workplace learning is its lack of relevance to the actual work being done: Concerningly, one out of every three respondents said learning has little or no impact on their work.

To close this gap and address other issues that arose in our findings, it's vital to understand what is driving this disconnect and what learning & development (L&D) professionals (with the support of business leaders) can do about it. We uncovered three key challenges:

- **The workforce needs support** making the connection between emerging skills and their work.
- **Organizations, however, promote the prioritization of work over learning**, spurring workers to focus only on the bare minimum to meet learning mandates.
- **The traditional linear career model of learn-work-retire** is stalling the adoption of continuous learning as it effectively encourages workers to ditch education when they step through the office door.


By unpacking the outdated career model and analyzing respondents' top-ranked requests for a new-and-improved approach to learning, we've developed a brand-new career model fit for the 21st century, as well as a framework for achieving it through the three Ms: measurement, motivation and mobility.

Our key takeaways:

- **Knowledge workers are blind to the problem – it’s time for a wake-up call.** The majority of workers in our study (65%) don’t see the need to upskill. The workforce needs support from employers to adopt a continuous learning mindset – they must first understand why, and then focus on how.
- **Workers need to understand learning’s relevance to work.** A total of 43% of respondents believe their learning has only a moderate impact on their work. Over one-third (34%) say there’s limited impact – or none at all – on work. This has to change. In order to answer the question, “Why adopt a continuous learning mindset?” business leaders need to focus on better integrating learning and work.
- **Employees are turning to employers for support – but finding the well dry.** The majority of workers in our study (73%) depend on their employer for support in preparing for the future of work. Despite this, over half are concerned about their employers’ ability to do so. To step up their game, employers need to help workers become adaptable. Rather than confining workers to one job role, employers should promote a task-based view of work and support movement across units, departments and teams.
- **Better integration of learning and work demands a better L&D structure.** The majority of L&D departments operate in a silo, with little input from the rest of the business and little alignment with business strategy, according to our recent report [“Relearning How We Learn.”](#)² Organizations need to make it a dual responsibility of strategy leaders and L&D to ensure learning is in line with the changing world of work.
- **Let the data guide the way.** To shift toward a modern career model, organizations need to harness employee data, focusing foremost on measuring learning against job performance. Only 15% of respondents say their employer is doing this today.
- **Most workers approach learning as a must-do, not a want-to-do.** We analyzed a variety of responses in our study to create learner profiles for each respondent. The results were disheartening – more than half of respondents (51%) can be considered “compliant learners,” who undertake training only to meet performance goals. Very few respondents learn because they consider it important for professional growth (27%), and even fewer learn for the love of learning (22%). It’s imperative that learning be made relevant to work.
- **It’s all about me, me, me.** Organizations must provide learning experiences that are data-driven, relevant and personalized. This is the core of our Three M methodology.



To shift toward a modern career model, organizations need to harness employee data, focusing foremost on measuring learning against job performance.



CURRENT LEARNING MODELS ARE BROKEN

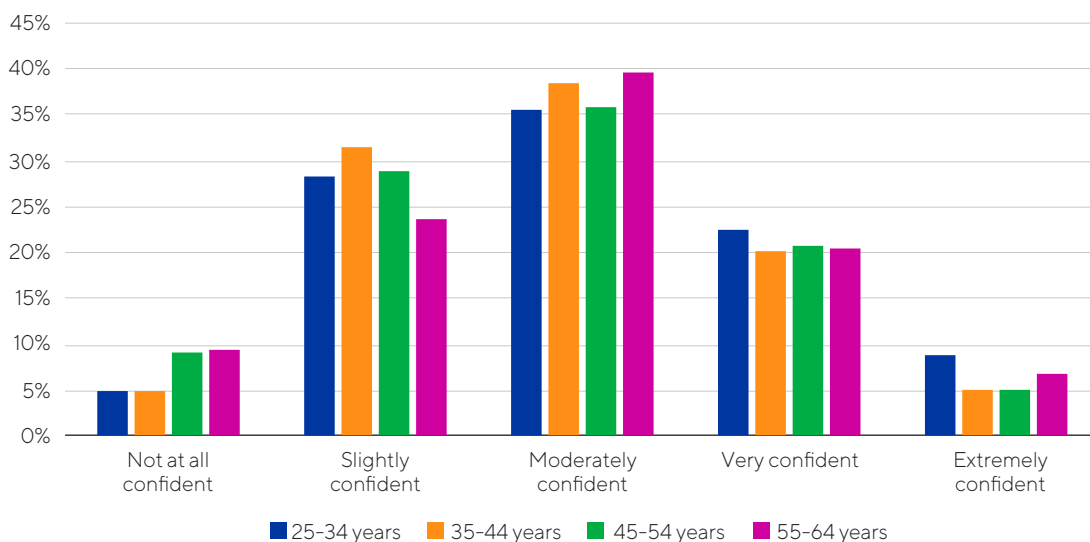
Whether a digital native or a digital nomad, every knowledge worker is confronted with the same rapid pace of change unique to the digital age and the subsequent urgent need to adopt a continuous learning mindset. The spotlight on this issue has been well-and-truly switched on; our LinkedIn news feeds are clogged with rundowns of the “top 10 skills of the year” or predictions for next year.

But readers of such lists are often left wondering what (if anything) this has actually got to do with their work, and who (if anyone) is keeping up. Why would a marketing manager need to be highly skilled in artificial intelligence (AI)? Why would an accountant need UX design skills? It’s all too easy to shrug, say, “This won’t impact me,” and carry on doing the same-old-same-old.

This seems to be the mindset of the majority of knowledge workers, according to our study. Most respondents think they’re exempt from upskilling, with 65% expressing confidence that their current skillset will sustain them throughout their career (see Figure 1). This confidence actually increases with the length of the career ahead, with millennials scoring above-average results for “very/extremely confident.”

Misplaced confidence in current skillset

How confident are you that the skills and knowledge you have today will serve you through your long-term career?



Base: 1,056 respondents

Source: Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work

Figure 1

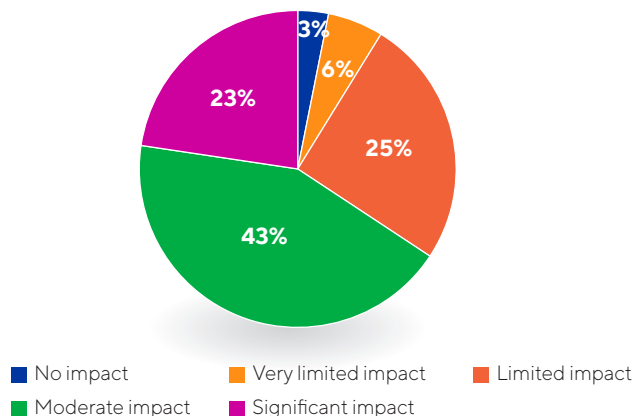
While not every employee will need to build advanced algorithms like the engineers at DeepMind, most jobs – 75% of them, according to our recent research – will be augmented by automation and AI, and 13% of new jobs in the future will be created by these technologies. It’s vital that workers gain at least a high-level understanding of these new technologies and how to work alongside them.

Workers seem to need support connecting the dots between fast emerging skills and their own work. AI (often found at the top of current and emerging top-skills lists), for example, should be on everyone’s agenda. While not every employee will need to build advanced algorithms like the engineers at DeepMind, most jobs – 75% of them, according to our recent research – will be augmented by automation and AI, and 13% of new jobs in the future will be created by these technologies.³ It’s vital that workers gain at least a high-level understanding of these new technologies and how to work alongside them. (To learn more about why marketing managers must know about AI, see our report “[21 Marketing Jobs of the Future](#).”⁴)

Workers are struggling to find this connection between learning and work, however, and that makes it very easy for them to deprioritize learning. If a large proportion of respondents (43%) believe their learning has only a moderate impact on their work (see Figure 2), and 34% go so far as to say there’s limited impact – or none at all – on work, what motivation is there to learn new skills? Why would they give up precious time to learn something with no bearing on their performance?

The work-learn disconnect

What impact do you think training has on your job?



Base: 1,056 respondents

Source: Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work

Figure 2

Not only is the importance of learning misunderstood by employees, but employers are also offering inadequate support for adopting a continuous learning mindset. For nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%), the employer was the number-one go-to for information on how work is changing, compared with only 7% relying on governments and 4% on academic institutions. And yet over half of respondents voiced concern about their employer’s ability to do so. It’s time for L&D professionals to rethink how learning works.

VR education experiences won’t fix the problem

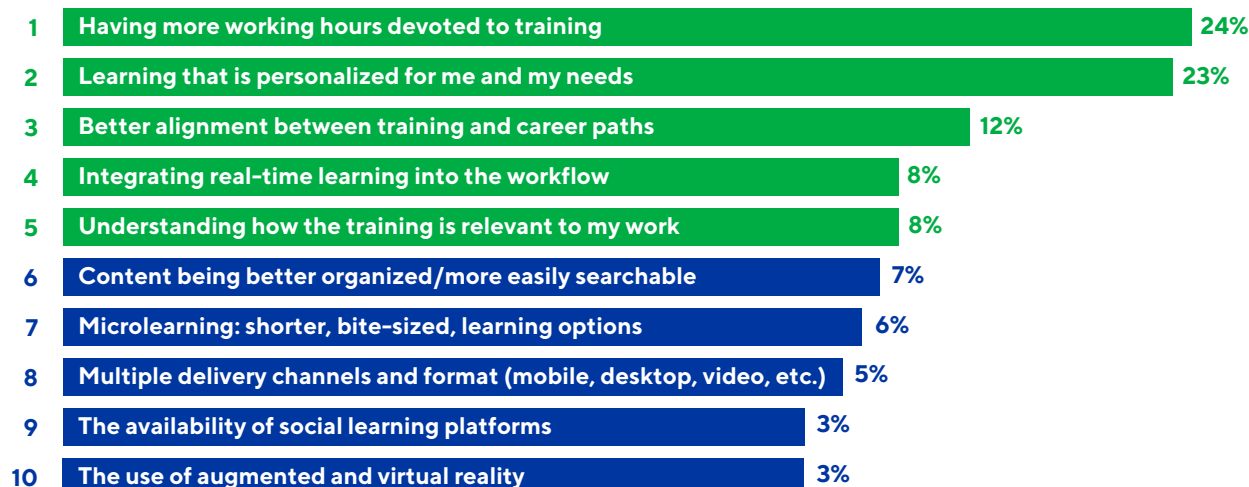
It’s tempting for L&D professionals to turn to new delivery models such as virtual or augmented reality, social learning platforms or micro-learning techniques to encourage a new learning mindset. According to our “[Relearning How We Learn](#)” report, the percentage of business leaders using AR/VR learning technologies will grow from 19% today to 68% in five years.⁵

However, these types of fixes don’t fully address what workers say would help them learn more effectively, such as dedicated time at work for learning, and more personalized learning that’s aligned with their career path (see Figure 3). These sentiments highlight a sense of frustration among the workforce: What’s learning got to do with me? How can I find the time to learn when the 9-5 is devoted solely to “work”? How can learning help me stay employable over a 40-, 50-, 60-year career?

New methods of learning delivery, meanwhile, ranked in the bottom half of responses in our study. While important, overhauling the method of delivery won’t solve the deeper, structural issues blocking learning from being effective.

How to inspire continuous learning

What would help you learn more effectively?



Base: 1,056 respondents
Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work
Figure 3

Structural disconnects between learning and work

To address these issues, organizations need to look internally at their own structural approach to learning and development. In “Relearning How We Learn,” we found that L&D practices are stuck in a silo: 60% of businesses agreed that learning strategy is the responsibility of the L&D and/or HR department alone, with little input coming from the rest of the business.

While the chief learning officer’s (CLO) primary responsibility should be to align business strategy with workforce learning and development, organizations today are slow to promote CLOs. Nearly every Fortune 500 company has *someone* in charge of L&D, but rather than a C-suite position, they’re more likely to be a “head of L&D” or a “training director.”⁶

Organizations need to overhaul their approach to learning across the board, not just within the L&D and/or HR silo. This must start with business leaders from across the board taking greater responsibility for learning programs, working together with the CLO to create development plans that align the workforce with the strategic direction of the company (see Quick Take, page 20).


Updating the concept of ‘career’

It’s not just the structure of the organization that reinforces the disconnect between learning and work; it’s also the structure of the individual’s work life.

Easily identifiable by a 40-hour, five-day work week, the current career model is the product of the Second Industrial Revolution, and came into force over a century ago. Robert Owen, one of the 19th century founders of the cooperative movement, marketed his radical idea with the slogan, “Eight hours’ labor, eight hours’ recreation, eight hours’ rest.” Today, a catchier slogan might be Dolly Parton’s “Working 9 to 5.”

This career model promotes a learn-work-retire cadence, encouraging workers to give up any meaningful learning as soon as they step through the office door. This might have made sense when the pace of change was slow enough for one set of skills to last a lifetime, but that’s not the case today.

We’ve identified five additional traps that stunt learning at work (see Figure 4, next page).



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The traps of the outdated career model

	<p>Restrictive job roles. Workers currently consider their work within the confines of a specific job role: “I am a nurse,” “I am an IT consultant.” Rather than branching out in experience and learning, they become increasingly mechanical in the way they execute the same tasks over and over, throughout their career.</p>
	<p>One-way streets and linear hierarchies. Restrictive job roles are further reinforced by linear hierarchies, which are still the norm. Consider a colleague or friend who makes a sideways move to more meaningful work for the same pay – would you celebrate in the same way as if it were a promotion? Learning and development can’t even keep up with linear hierarchies, despite their being ingrained in work for decades. For example, only receiving management training after you’ve become a manager is common across many organizations.</p>
	<p>Working 9-5. The majority of workers are still confined to the 9-5 and are programmed to believe that these 40 hours a week are for work only. But research reveals that actual time spent working is more like three hours a day and that workers fill up their remaining hours not with learning but with unrelated activities: reading news websites (on average, 65 minutes a day), checking social media (44 minutes a day) and talking to colleagues about non-work-related topics (40 minutes a day).⁷ Workers seem unaware that these extra 2.5 hours of the workday could be put to better use; in our study, the number-one barrier to continuous learning was a lack of time.</p>
	<p>“But that’s how it’s always been done.” As is the case for many workers, “working for the man” means doing your time in exchange for a paycheck. No more, no less. Finding true purpose in work is not the reality for most; in fact, some studies show most businesses don’t even define a collective purpose.⁸ There’s still very little incentive to learn and develop beyond the confines of a restrictive job role.</p>
	<p>One-size-fits-all. Customer experience (CX) today is often so personalized that users wonder whether their devices are somehow listening to them – because how else can Instagram surface such relevant ads?⁹ The employee experience, however, doesn’t even come close to being as personalized and relevant. This is also an issue on the learning front: The second highest rated barrier to learning identified in our research was a lack of relevance of learning materials for individuals and their work.</p>

Source: Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work
Figure 4

On a positive note, some of these traps are starting to regress.¹⁰ For example, software developers often focus on project-based work adopting Agile methodologies, and a number of small companies across the UK have adopted the four-day work week, some claiming a subsequent 30% increase in productivity.¹¹ But steps in the right direction are not widespread, especially in larger organizations, which can be slower to overhaul traditional operational practices.

Learning, by now, should be considered just as important as the work itself. Indeed, learning is the fuel for modern work and fulfilling careers that stand the test of time.

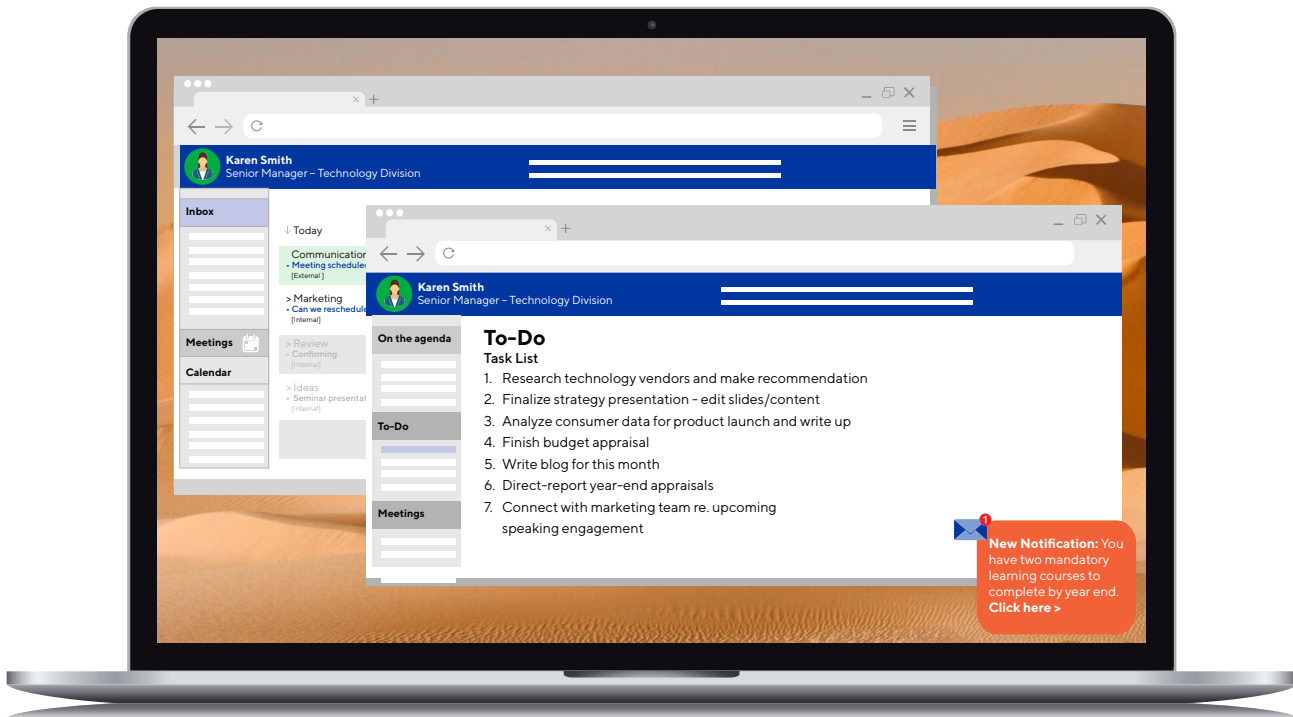


KEEP CALM AND CAREER ON: INTRODUCING THE MODERN CAREER MODEL

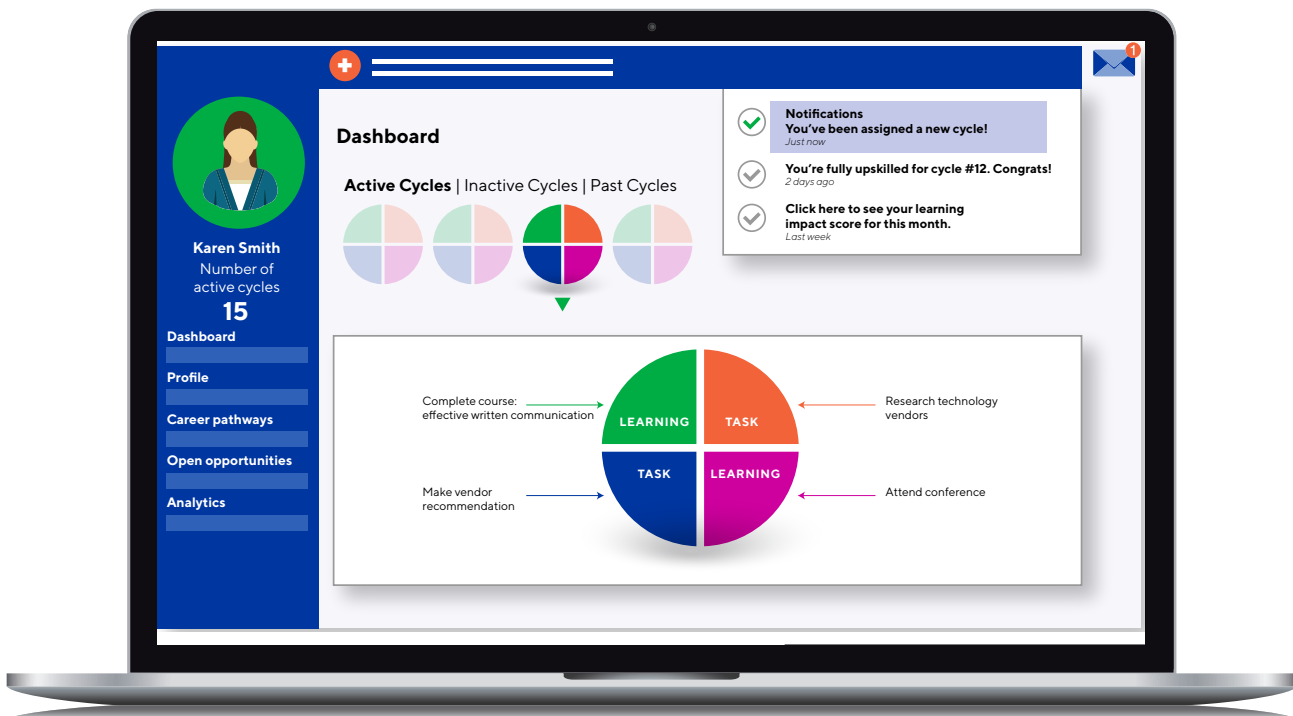
We've designed a model of the modern career, based on a cyclical relationship between learning and work. In our model, work is broken down into smaller parts – tasks – into which learning is fully integrated, (see Figure 5).

Updating the career-learning mindset From the outdated career model...

Old career model



... to the modern career model



Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 5

The core component of the modern career model: the cycle

In the modern career model, each worker considers his or her career not as a series of projects on the one hand and learning goals on the other but as a series of cycles in which the two are intertwined and interrelated (see Figure 5, previous page). This cyclical relationship implies that the impact of learning on work is considered just as important – and demands just as much attention – as the impact that emerging work has on learning.

A cycle can be initiated, for example, by an emerging task need within the organization. As a new task emerges, learning is aligned. For example, someone with the task of building a people analytics capability in the organization might start by engaging with learning resources, such as “Data Analytics in HR” or “An Introduction to Organizational Network Analysis.”

As the task is undertaken, the L&D leader tracks how effective the learning is, in relation to the work being done. For example, a relevant metric might be increased speed and accuracy. More learning can be recommended to fine-tune progress as gaps are assessed.

Instead of learning once, at the onboarding stage of a new project, continuous learning ensures the function remains agile, on the cutting edge of best-in-class and keeping up with the pace of change. This is particularly true as new technologies impact job functions. Consider our example of building a people analytics function and learning about organizational network analysis (ONA). While ONA can introduce bountiful opportunities to understanding how work actually gets done (not often revealed on the static org chart), many organizations struggle to integrate the technology and find appropriate uses. Success with ONA would be more likely if organizations took a continuous learning approach, operating in a cycled manner rather than a one-off course that isn't integrated with the actual work.

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Matching cycles to individuals

Another key component of the modern career model is a deeper level of personalization and relevance. When work is broken down into smaller component parts (or cycles), workers are no longer restricted by pre-defined job roles that leave little room for taking on new tasks outside their remit.

By collecting robust data on individual goals, motivations and learning preferences, as well as skillsets and job performance, L&D teams can match people with cycles that suit their interests and strengths.

At its most agile, this new model should facilitate the fluid movement of the workforce across teams and departments. One cycle might sit in marketing, and another cycle might sit in the business intelligence department. This fluid movement would not only ensure an agile workforce; it would also expand learning and development opportunities and – when personalized – increase employee engagement and satisfaction by connecting individuals with work they're excited about.

In summary, the main features of the modern career model are:

- Within each cycle, learning is indivisible from work.
- Proactive, personalized matchmaking occurs between individuals and cycles.
- The transition between cycles is fluid, as learning is prioritized by the needs of the organization and the wider digital economy.

Only when we consider learning as an integral part of every cycle will it achieve the same status as work and become truly continuous.

Quick Take

Whose job is it?

It is mission critical for organizations to take responsibility for updated learning and development for the *entire* workforce, not just senior executives. Without learning opportunities for all knowledge workers, the workforce is heading toward a destructive segmentation between top-tier knowledge workers and blue-collar work, with “lower-tier” knowledge workers left in a work no-man’s land as machines do (more and more of) everything.

Ultimately, a collaborative effort between business, government and academia is what it will take to address the urgent global reskilling need.

At the center of this collaboration sits the individual. It is expected that knowledge workers assume agency for their careers. Thankfully, of the workers surveyed here, 63% agreed they were responsible for their own learning and development. However, individuals still require the tools, coaching and access to information (e.g., changing skills requirements) to get learning to work.

Academia could play a role here. For example, in “[21 More Jobs of the Future](#),” we proposed the Uni4Life Coordinator role.¹² Operating out of a college or university, this person would support students and alumni in creating personalized, real-time learning and career paths, leveraging insights from big data analytics and predictive algorithms, as well as uniquely human qualities like coaching, empathy and judgment.

Businesses can also provide incentives. AT&T’s \$1 billion retraining program ensures both the organization and its workers take responsibility for learning and development. Alongside tangible partnerships with academia, AT&T launched a web-based learning platform for employees and provided access to information in its Career Intelligence portal, where workers can see what jobs are available, the skills required and even the potential salary range. It’s up to the employee to take advantage of all that AT&T is offering – and it seems to be working. According to the company, more than half of its employees have completed 2.7 million online courses in areas such as data science, cybersecurity and agile project management.¹³


What the modern career model means for employers and employees

Reskilling initiatives can be off-putting because the assumption is the employee will be “out-of-action” while they acquire new skills. However, this assumption is restricted by viewing work as job roles rather than tasks. In the modern career model, a worker can be simultaneously learning for one cycle and performing task-based work in another cycle.

This new approach to learning offers a robust employee value proposition (EVP) that could ultimately help organizations attract and retain top talent by keeping them satisfied and engaged with work throughout their tenure.

When organizations embrace continuous learning, they’re also better equipped to counteract fear-mongering headlines about automation killing off large numbers of jobs. It will become clear that only certain *tasks* (or cycles) will be taken over by machines, not entire careers. Instead of fearing obsolescence, the workforce will understand the impact reskilling has on the breadth of work available to them.

And finally, happy employees create a better employer brand, which impacts businesses’ stock prices considerably. The stock prices of *Fortune’s* “100 Best Companies to Work” rose 14% per year from 1998 to 2005 vs. a 6% increase for companies not on the list.¹⁴



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A day in the life of the 21st century career

Adrian is feeling a bit “meh” about some of his current cycles and wants to shake things up. Before he even navigates to his cycle overview page, he receives a notification from his AI-powered cycle strategist:

▶ *“Adrian, you’ve been working on Cycles #416, #223 and #14 for eight months now, and we’re seeing a slight decrease in your concentration and productivity. We’ve gathered a set of new cycles you might want to check out!”*

Adrian looks at the new list of cycles and immediately swipes left on one or two that he’d had in his queue but now decides firmly against. He comes across a brand-new cycle that would allow him to work on his strategic collaboration skills by working with a department he’d not come across before. It might even involve some travel to China, which he’d wanted to visit ever since his eldest daughter had moved there.

Immediately intrigued, Adrian swipes right for more information.

SHIFTING TOWARD THE NEW CAREER MODEL WITH THE THREE Ms

We've developed a framework to help organizations evolve their career models. The L&D leader, working with dual responsibility from business leaders (see Quick Take, page 20), must focus on three Ms: measurement, motivation and mobility.

Measurement

Making use of employee data on learning and work is the first step to implementing the new career model. Data drives the vast majority of our consumer experiences today, ensuring they are personalized and relevant. But the same cannot be said for employee experiences provided by the majority of employers.

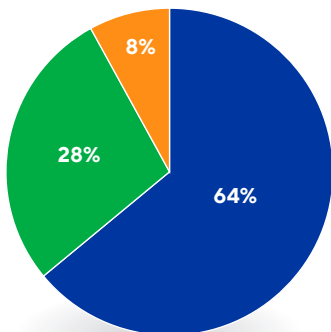
The challenge

According to our study, most organizations are not making use of employee data or HR analytics tools to process the data and drive better employee experiences (see Figure 6). This lack of investment in the people analytics space is stifling opportunities to uncover a deeper, more actionable understanding of the skills spread across the organization – insight that is invaluable for both the CHRO and CEO.

Further, instead of focusing on the impact of learning on work and vice versa, the majority of respondents in our study said their companies measure learning simply in terms of hours spent (see Figure 7). Because employers are unable to demonstrate to employees the correlation between learning and work, they can expect employees to deprioritize learning too.

A lack of workforce analytics

Do you use any employee analytics or sophisticated analysis that supports the career development/training plans of your team?

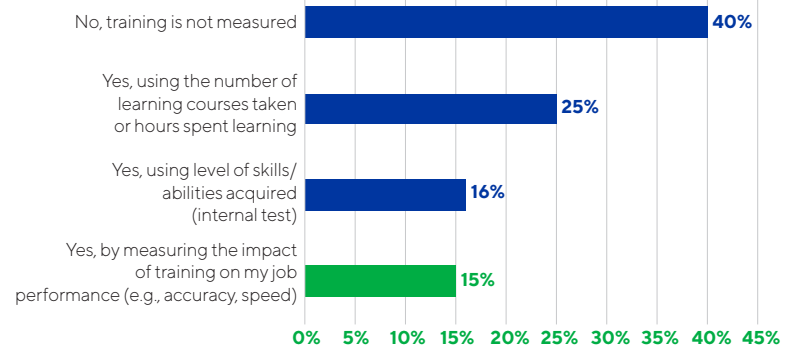


- No, we don't
- Yes, we do, but with limited effectiveness
- Yes, we use analysis effectively

Base: Respondents managing direct report (n=365)
Source: Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work
Figure 6

A need for new metrics

Does your employer measure your training?



Base: 1,056 respondents
Source: Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work
Figure 7

The opportunity

When business leaders can effectively collect and process employee performance data, learning can be measured in terms of how it impacts work outcomes, a pivotal step in breaking down barriers between the two.

AT&T, for example, decided to combat change by reskilling its existing workforce. The company directly aligned employee performance metrics with the goals of the business, and created a platform for evaluating workforce skills (for more on AT&T's \$1 billion reskilling initiative, see Quick Take, page 14).

But linking learning to task performance metrics is only the start. To equalize learning and work, metrics should also map work to learning. In other words, skill goals should be assigned to each business or individual's goals. Hitting a sales target? What new sales technique are your employees learning? Publishing two blogs a quarter? What writing courses are they taking? Working on global projects? How are you building your team's cultural awareness?

Three steps to improving measurement:

- 1 Reassess your measurements.** Tracking the hours spent learning or the number of courses completed won't cut it. More relevant metrics map the impact of learning to performance measures, such as accuracy and speed. Start by matching learning objectives with job requirements and then measure performance before and after learning to monitor improvements.
- 2 Measure well *and often*. The majority of respondents (56%) said their training is measured either annually or less than annually.** This isn't good enough. The ultimate goal is to create real-time employee profiles, encompassing skills, work performance and engagement. This data can be collected through a myriad of tools available in the HR tech space – from more frequent and systematically documented manager-report meetings, to pulse surveys, to listening software that trawls sentiment across professional social media (e.g., Yammer).
- 3 Celebrate the individual.** Measures such as enjoyment, relevance and engagement with both learning and work provide the foundation for truly personalized employee experiences. Pulse surveys are a great way to measure sentiment, but more advanced, real-time solutions are cropping up in the market. Humanyze, for example, sells badges embedded with infrared, voice and GPS sensors to monitor employee behavior. Other behavioral monitoring technology, like the Riff videoconferencing platform, reveals detailed emotional responses to work, such as levels of concentration, attention and alertness.¹⁵

Quick Take

A dual responsibility between business strategy and L&D

While most business leaders would agree that aligning L&D with business strategy is logical and necessary, this is not the norm today. Only 52% of talent developers currently work with business partners, according to a recent LinkedIn survey, although this figure is up 20% since 2018.¹⁶

In the modern career model, L&D functions must be prepared to provide the learning segment of each cycle, nimbly, as the new task need emerges in line with the business strategy. This requires L&D to improve its partnership with business leaders, with both sides working together to introduce, prioritize and design new cycles and understand their impact on the business.

There could even be a new role – a cycle developer or cycle strategist – that bridges the gap between the business and L&D.¹⁷ A cycle strategist would understand the business strategy and translate it into new task needs. AI-driven tools (using data from an organizational skills nomenclature and external labor market data) would then enable the cycle strategist to quickly connect tasks to skills, and skills to learning, creating any number of new cycles for the business.

Allianz, for example, uses internal assessments as well as LinkedIn Learning skills data to understand the current skills across the workforce and then map the critical skills the company will need in the future, in line with its business strategy.¹⁸

Motivation

In our study, we found that motivated employees are more likely to find learning relevant to their job, whether that motivation is a love of learning or the opportunity for career development. It comes down to the individual, and that's ultimately why organizations must focus on personalizing employee experiences.

The challenge

According to our research, however, most workers today learn not because they *want* to or *need* to (because they think it will lead to greater success) but because they *have* to. We analyzed a variety of responses in our study to create learner profiles for each respondent (see Figure 8). The results were surprising: More than half of respondents can be considered "compliant learners," who undertake training only to meet performance goals but see very little relevance between that learning and how they perform on their job.

These learners are not reaching their full potential, and their employers are not getting the best out of them. In times of change, they will be less prepared to pivot toward new tasks and take on new responsibilities, because they have not adopted a continuous learning mindset. They see learning as a duty only. By supporting employees to take a future-focused approach to work by connecting learning to career growth, employers can convert "compliant learners" to "achievers," who are better prepared to survive and thrive in the digital age.

Learner profiles



(Multiple response permitted.)

Response base: 1,056

Source: Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work

Figure 8

The opportunity

By tapping into individuals' motivations (whether that's a love of learning or a laser-sharp focus on professional development), organizations can personalize matches between cycles and employees, ensuring relevance and helping individuals achieve higher engagement and satisfaction. An "achiever," for example, might prefer cycles to remain strictly relevant to his or her development goals, whereas a "genuine" might be more open to branching out and trying unrelated cycles, simply for the enjoyment of learning something brand-new.

Salesforce, for example, uses AI to scan annual review documentation and identify people who reference skills or interests they've worked toward but don't use in their current role. The company then uses this information to recommend new internal opportunities where employees can put their hard-earned skills to work.¹⁹ The power of equalizing learning and work is in the ability to match people with opportunities that might better suit them – and be even more enjoyable for them – than their current role. The ability to move across roles, however, depends on a high level of fluidity, only achievable through better workforce mobility (the third and final M).

Three steps to encourage motivation:

- 1 Don't assume you know what employees want.** Each employee is motivated by different things. "Genuines" and "achievers" will have different expectations of learning, and employers have to deliver unique experiences that suit individual goals and preferences. The first "M," "measurement," helps employers keep track. Bear in mind that standard sentiment surveys often don't account for the fact that people are at different stages of the employee journey (e.g., entry-level, first-time manager, etc.) and different stages of life (new parent, period of bereavement). These are important variables that, when overlooked, result in an inability to personalize employee experiences. To tackle this, Learn@Forbes, for example, recently launched its Learning Paths program, which supports learners at career inflection points, such as first-time managers and fresh college graduates.²⁰
- 2 Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match.** Use individual employee data on skills, interests and goals to make personalized recommendations of relevant internal job opportunities instead of sending out one blanket email to the whole company (or pointing to one page on the company intranet) that shows open job roles/opportunities. A well-oiled data analytics team will be able to find the right algorithm to get the job done, just as LinkedIn and other job search sites have created robust tools to surface relevant job adverts for the individual. The functionality isn't new; it's just uncharted territory for many organizations.
- 3 Show relevance at every turn.** Ensure the relevance of every bit of learning undertaken is made clear to the employee by mapping it to existing and/or future opportunities. For example, use external labor market data (e.g., LinkedIn's economic graph²¹) to highlight the emerging skills that relate to the learning and the emerging job roles that require these skills.

Mobility

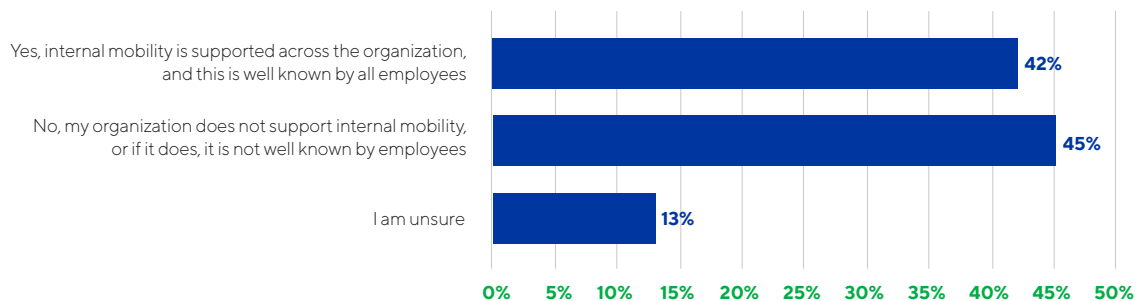
In order to enable fluid movement across cycles, organizations also need to make it easy for employees to move across projects, teams and departments.

The challenge

Unfortunately, 45% of respondents in our study said their organization doesn't support internal mobility or, if it does, it isn't well understood by employees (see Figure 9). Without mobility, workers are restricted to a single linear career path rather than responding to actual business needs and market demands. Consider the negative impact this has on attrition.

Getting off the linear career track

Does your organization support internal mobility?



Response base: 1,056

Source: Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work

Figure 9

The opportunity

Using measurement and motivation to match employees with relevant roles and tasks is wasted work if employees aren't free to move across the organization into these new positions.

When internal mobility is supported – and encouraged – the workforce becomes hyper-agile, enabled to pivot in line with the business as the strategic direction changes in line with the next “big bet.” For the employee, the ability to move across cycles promises to boost engagement and satisfaction as exposure to new experiences reduces the risk of boredom and, if work is effectively matched to employee's motivations, it can lead to far more enjoyable work for the individual.

Unilever, for example, is working with internal mobility provider Gloat to create a data-driven internal talent marketplace. The platform opens up information about jobs and projects across the company, proactively recommending them to individuals based on their skills, experience and development areas.²² There has been so much interest in Unilever’s innovative HR practices that the company has started creating spin-off companies for specific services, starting with their rewards offering at uFlexReward.²³

Another example comes from Google’s gTech department (around 5000 employees).²⁴ The team introduced a similar talent marketplace (dubbed Project Chameleon) for matching employees to new projects. Both employees and managers rank their personal preferences, and then employees are matched to roles using a Gale-Shapley Deferred Acceptance Algorithm, which has been used for decades in U.S. hospitals to match graduating doctors to hospitals. One of the unintended benefits of the project, as explained by those overseeing the project, was that movement in the organization was normalized. By developing robust tools to support mobility, mobility in turn became embedded into the culture of the organization.

Three steps to enabling mobility:

- 1 Is HR ready for internal mobility?** Ensure that HR has the right measurement tools in place to understand the spread of skills and job opportunities across the organization. With a robust competency framework and skills profiles for each individual, businesses can make meaningful recommendations for opportunities across the business.
- 2 Transparency through communication.** Make sure every employee has access to information regarding internal mobility opportunities. It’s no good having the process in place if no one knows enough to take advantage of it. Gloat, for example, creates personalized dashboards for each employee and surfaces relevant job opportunities based on the individual’s current skillset and aspirations. The user can simply “like” or “dislike” an opportunity (akin to swiping left or right on popular dating apps). Likes generate alerts to relevant HR managers, who advance the request to the next stage.
- 3 Mobility and motivation go hand-in-hand.** HR – working with business leaders across the board – needs to inculcate a culture of fluidity and flexibility. Ensure that movement in any direction (not just vertical) is celebrated and rewarded. Make sure there is a flexible value proposition in place (see “celebrate fluidity” in Figure 10).



THE MODEL OF A MODERN CAREER: FROM TRAPS TO OPPORTUNITIES

With a data-driven, personalized approach and far more fluid movement across job roles, projects and tasks, the modern career model closes the book on Owen’s outdated model.

To help paint the picture, we’ve taken the six traps of Owen’s outdated model and matched them with the opportunities of the modern career model (see Figure 10). By firmly integrating learning and work with a career fit for the 21st century, we think the future of work looks bright.

A new career model

From Traps	To Opportunities
The Learn-Work-Retire Model	<p>60+ Years of Learning and Work</p> <p>With people living – and working – longer than ever, and demand for new skills continuously emerging in the digital age, it’s vital that careers stand the test of time. Instead of pre-defined linear pathways, workers should be empowered to change direction as their individual priorities change – because no one will want the same things (or even perhaps believe in the same things) over a 60-plus year career.</p> <p>Organizations should facilitate reinvention across all ages and stages of work by opening up opportunities across various learning and work cycles.</p>
Restrictive Job Roles	<p>Work Breaks into Tasks</p> <p>When work is understood at the task level, and approached on a project-by-project basis (like at Google, for example²⁵), learning is prioritized to enable shifts across projects. This fluid movement, which sometimes unexpectedly bridges the gap between unrelated fields, can bring big benefits to the organization. When hiring directors, Marvel Studios, for instance, looks for candidates with experience in wildly different domains – Shakespeare, horror, espionage and comedy. This balance of continuity and innovation seems to work – the average Rotten Tomatoes rating for franchise films is 68% vs. the Marvel films’ average of 84%. Other industries have followed suit: Energy companies hiring meteorologists, hedge funds hiring chess players and consulting firms hiring anthropologists.²⁶</p>
One-Way Street: Linear Hierarchy	<p>Celebrate Fluidity</p> <p>Today, fluid movement across projects and roles is still considered a bit odd.</p> <p>To support the prioritization of learning not just in theory but also in practice, organizations need to reward and celebrate movement in all directions, not just linear. Flexible reward programs can be used to support fluid movement by ensuring compensation that suits both age and life stage, regardless of where you are in the learning and work cycle. Netflix allows people to choose what percentage of their salary they take in stock options (the amount can also change over time), which allows workers to increase their cashflow in line with life’s demands. This has led to Netflix boasting the highest percentage of workers who believe they are being compensated fairly across the rest of the FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google).²⁷</p>

Working 9 to 5	<p>Time Well Spent</p> <p>For learning and work to truly be considered equals, learning should be baked into the day-to-day of work. For example, Ideo, an international design and consulting firm, has installed “inspiration Mondays,” where workers are encouraged to engage in learning outside of their current remit. Taking part in disparate, disconnected learning and experience is proven to boost engagement and productivity.²⁸</p>
“But That’s How It’s Always Been Done”	<p>Find Meaning</p> <p>There’s more to incentivizing than salary alone. There is a growing urgency for organizations to demonstrate a greater purpose, beyond the financial satisfaction of shareholders. That’s one reason companies like Roche Pharma India are employing a chief purpose officer. The workforce is looking for purpose too, and will increasingly seek alignment between their own personal purpose and the organization’s. With purpose, the workforce will find the motivation needed to adopt more agile, less clear-cut approaches to work and learning rather than simply get in, get out, get paid.</p>
One-Size-Fits-All	<p>Play Matchmaker</p> <p>Unlike the one-size-fits-all model of learning and work, data-driven, personalized, relevant employee experiences ensure the matchmaking of people with learning and work cycles that are suited to their individual capabilities and interests. What’s more, careers start to become future-proof, as predictive capabilities proactively prepare talent for the future of work. As the proverbial crystal ball, predictive analytics deliver insights into talent, the organization and the marketplace to help organizations make better decisions for talent mobility. For example, AXA works with provider People Analytix to incorporate and analyze external labor market data and job advertisement data to recommend new skills and jobs to employees.²⁹</p>

Source: Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work
Figure 10

Final word

The workforce has a responsibility to face the realities of modern work, just as employers have a responsibility to support them in doing so. Fundamentally, it’s an opportunity for workers to establish careers that are more meaningful, more challenging and quite simply – better for everybody. A new approach to careers, one that prioritizes learning, is an exciting opportunity to reimagine the world of work in the digital age.

Methodology and demographics

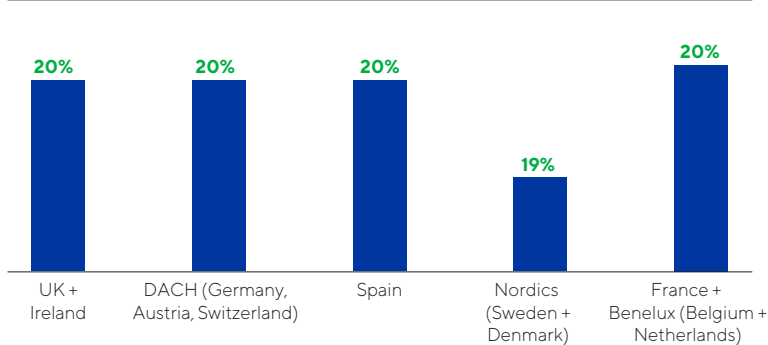
This report is based on survey work undertaken by a third-party research provider. An online survey was conducted in June 2019 across Europe, with 1,056 knowledge workers up to director level (not including director, head of business unit, senior leadership or C-suite), across industries.

Demographics

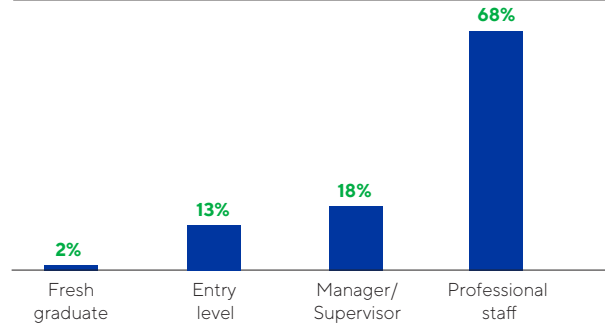
By industry

Finance (banking, insurance, investment, etc.)	14%
Retail/Wholesale (shops and other retail distribution, hotels, restaurants, car dealerships, wholesale trade)	12%
Manufacturing (chemicals/pharmaceuticals, automotive, food/drink, textiles, paper, clothing, equipment, electronics, fur)	15%
Media	2%
Public sector (central or local government, state education, state healthcare, law enforcement, fire service, social security)	17%
Transport (railways, road transport, shipping, air transport, etc.)	10%
Utilities (energy, oil and gas, etc.)	5%
Professional services	15%
Telecommunications	8%
Other; please specify	3%

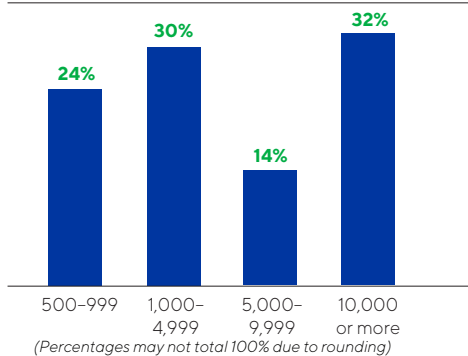
REGIONS



ROLE



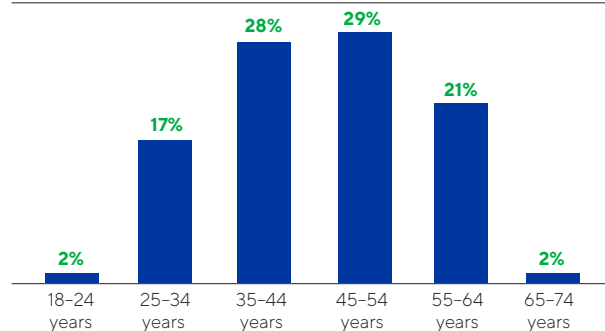
COMPANY SIZE



GENDER



AGE



Endnotes

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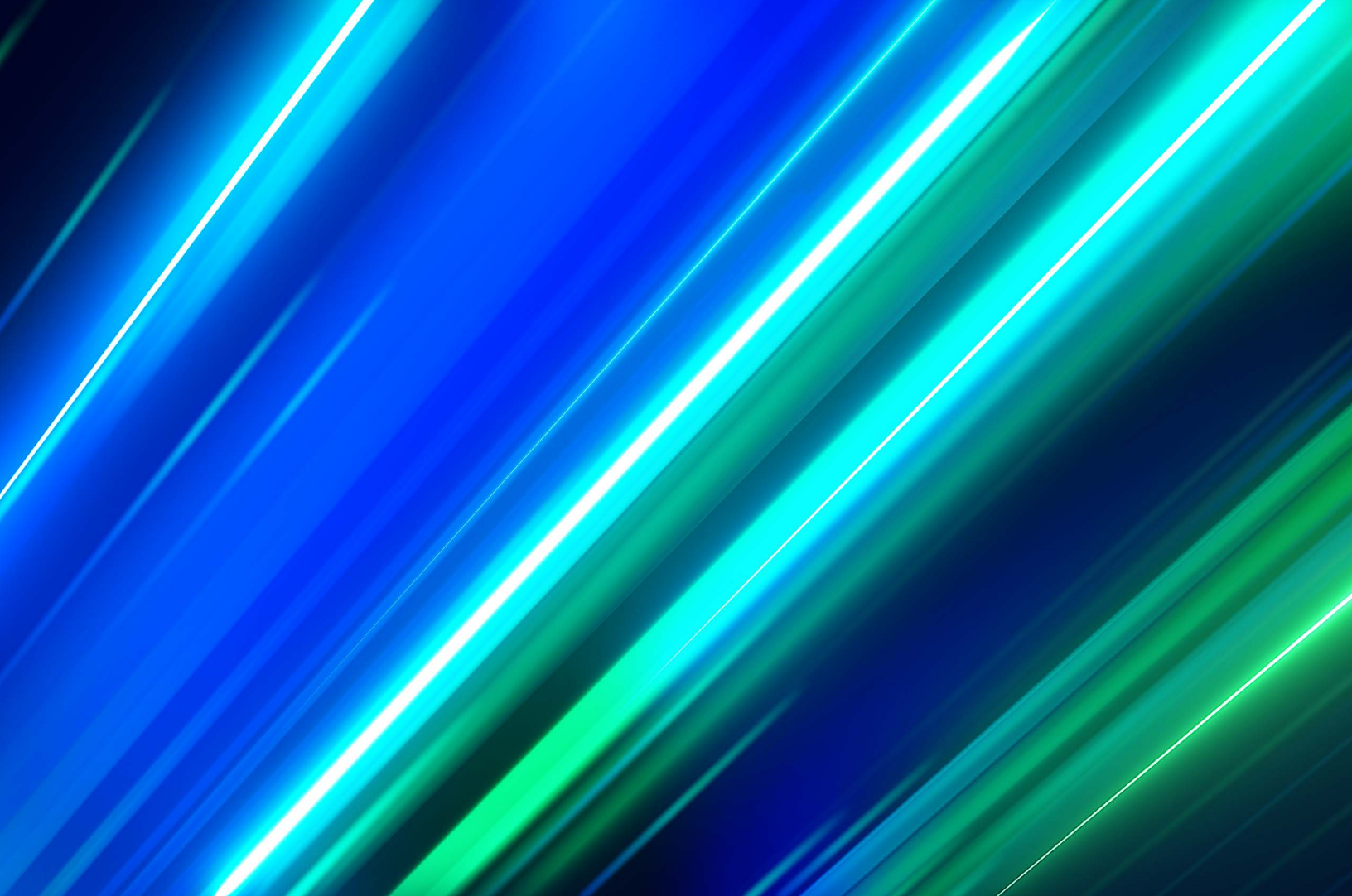
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About the Center for the Future of Work

Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work™ is chartered to examine how work is changing, and will change, in response to the emergence of new technologies, new business practices and new workers. The Center provides original research and analysis of work trends and dynamics, and collaborates with a wide range of business, technology and academic thinkers about what the future of work will look like as technology changes so many aspects of our working lives. For more information, visit [Cognizant.com/futureofwork](https://www.cognizant.com/futureofwork), or contact Ben Pring, Cognizant VP and Managing Director of the Center for the Future of Work, at Benjamin.Pring@cognizant.com.

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