



THRIVING THROUGH CHANGE WITH **CONTINUOUS**  
**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT** FOR YOUR WORKFORCE

How to go about skills development for a remote workforce

July 2023

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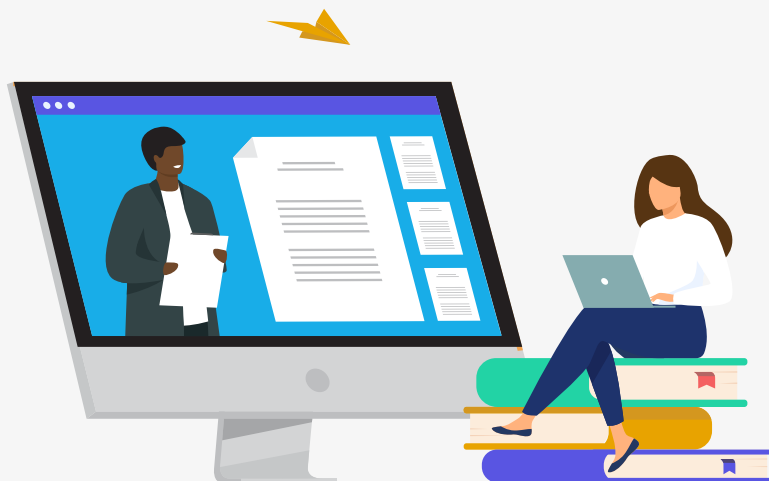


## Introduction

Digital training has been on the rise for some time. Globalization, technological advancements, and the gig economy all lead to an increase in remote working and the need for fresh, relevant, and personalized online training. Companies did step up to this challenge and most did plan for the increasingly digitized future by developing digital learning strategies.

However, nobody could have predicted the amount of change that happened within just a few months due to the global pandemic. Many systems that society thought were unshakeable took a jolt: the healthcare system, the education system, the transportation system, all the way to housing, finances, how we deal with mental health issues, and of course, how we work.

Change seems to be the only constant lately. Many things will no longer be the same. To some extent, this is actually a good thing. The pandemic is essentially fast forwarding the planet 10 years into the future, at least with regard to the adoption of internet technology.



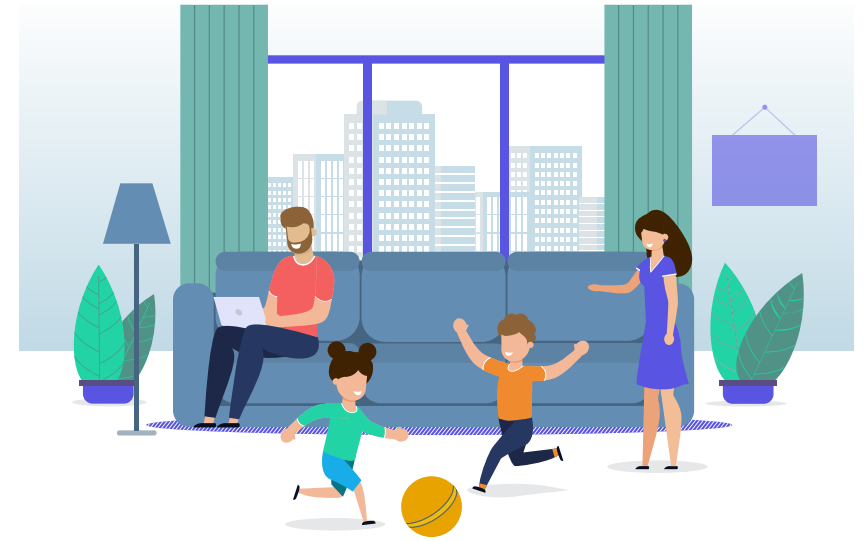
A growing number of employers and employees realize that work is an *activity*, not a place. Remote workers can be as productive – if not more so<sup>1</sup> – as those who go to an office each day. Remote work is here to stay and remote employees still need training and professional development if they are to not only ensure business continuity but also business success.

Therefore, L&D professionals need to step up their game, design the best learning experiences for all employees, and ensure continuous skills development for everyone. That's the only way to thrive through constant change.

## Transitioning to a virtual workforce

Of course, depending on industries and departments, not everyone can perform their jobs from their homes. Some employees' work may not transition to a remote environment; they still need to be physically present at their workplaces and they still need to keep their skills and competencies as sharp as always.

However, for those employees that only need a computer or laptop and an internet connection to do their jobs, remote work should be a sound alternative to working in an office. The transition comes with its challenges, but with the right resources, all hurdles can be overcome.



The role of Learning and Development departments has never been more important in these circumstances. Even before the pandemic<sup>2</sup>, 38% of remote workers and 15% of managers received no training on how to work remotely and more than half of fully remote workers reported that they want more training.

Taking a forced break from the office doesn't mean taking a break from skill-building. L&D professionals must understand the needs of various workers, identify the competencies needed to be successful, and embed training to support the development of the required skills.

Learning how to learn and work efficiently online are probably the most important skills any remote employee needs to master.

## Ensuring continuous skills development



The first step in ensuring that employees continuously develop their skills and competencies, regardless of where they are located when working, is to actually take a step back and conduct a **training needs analysis** to find answers to questions like:

- What's the size of the remote workforce?
- What are the types of work and interactions that happen online?
- What specific hard skills or soft skills do remote employees need?
- How are remote learners' needs different than those of other types of workers?
- What's the available technology that makes remote work possible?
- How well do people know how to use that technology?
- What other resources are available or needed?

Once the starting point gets clearer, it's time to create learning and **training strategies** that help remote workers build the skills needed to perform in a virtual work environment. It's important to align training with the company goals, keep all stakeholders in the loop (paying special attention to learners' feedback) and work on a strong delivery and implementation strategy.

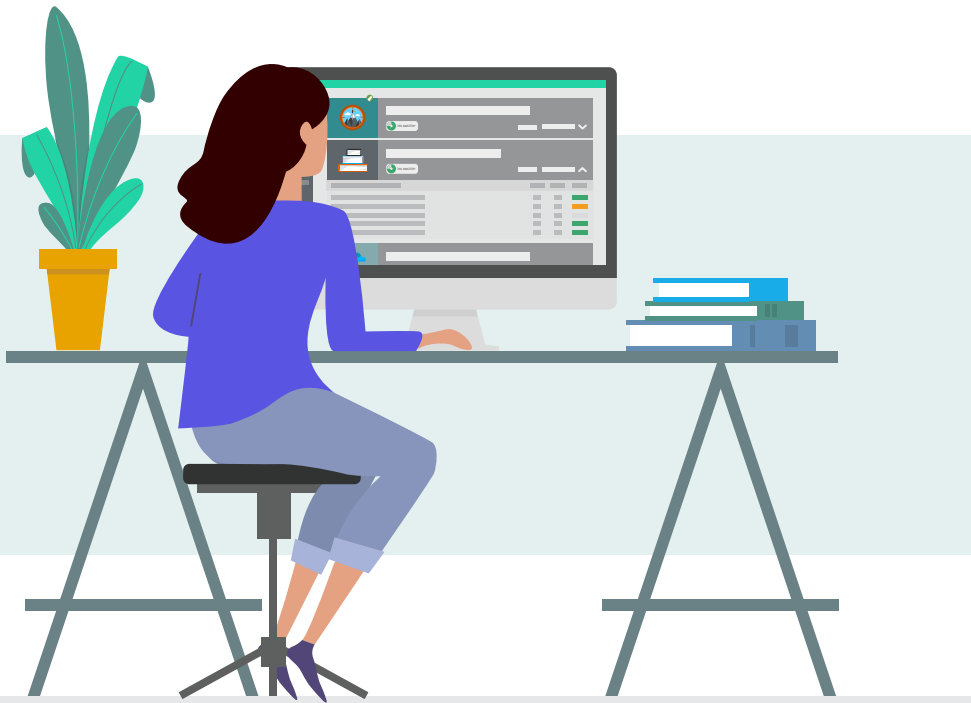
Employee skills development requires **ongoing support**. Skill mastery means constant practice, context, and emotional engagement. Online training programs need to support that. Remote training activities have to happen continuously until the needed skills and behaviors are embedded in the organizational (virtual) culture.



## Skills development for remote EMPLOYEES

To empower employees and make their work-from-home experience less overwhelming, here are the top skills they should master – and be included in remote skills development programs:

Newly remote employees need first of all to **learn how to learn online**. For this to happen, they need to know why any remote training module is important, how what they'll learn will fit into their job roles, and which online training resources can help them bridge personal and professional gaps.



Then, they need to know **how to use remote technology**. Whether we're talking about the Learning Management System they've been using for years or a new virtual conferencing tool, having a few tutorials on how to use certain tools or software is the way to go.



Another important skill remote employees need to have is related to **cybersecurity**. Cyberattacks have increased five-fold since the start of the pandemic<sup>3</sup> and businesses of all sizes have been affected. Most of the time, human error is an important factor in allowing these attacks to happen. Considering the number of personal devices used by employees to work, everyone must be trained in cybersecurity best practices.

Next in line comes the proper use of resources, with a special focus on **effective time management**. Remote employees have to be able to keep a regular schedule of their activities, prioritize and organize their tasks to meet deadlines, and generally be disciplined to overcome procrastination.





Remote employees need to be aware of the lack of direct supervision and be **self-motivated** and **task-oriented**, open to new challenges and opportunities, ready to avoid, identify and solve any problems that may come up while working from home, including troubleshooting basic hardware issues.

Even though everyone is based anywhere but the office, remote workers still need to **communicate and collaborate** effectively. Luckily, there are plenty of online tools available that support communication in a virtual environment, such as video conferencing, which includes the much needed visual and non-verbal cues that great conversations are made of.

Change is always a big factor for stress and people should be given the room and liberty to process things their way. **Being empathetic** is more important than ever today, and remote employees should be taught to handle all interactions with thoughtfulness and understanding.

Last but not least, people who work remotely must learn how to **manage their work environment**. A dedicated room, the same spot at the dining room table, certain time slots during the day that are blocked for work hours instead of personal or family hours are just a few examples.

For many people, the move to working from home was sudden and quite bumpy. Mastering the above soft and hard skills through continuous training opportunities can really make the whole experience better.



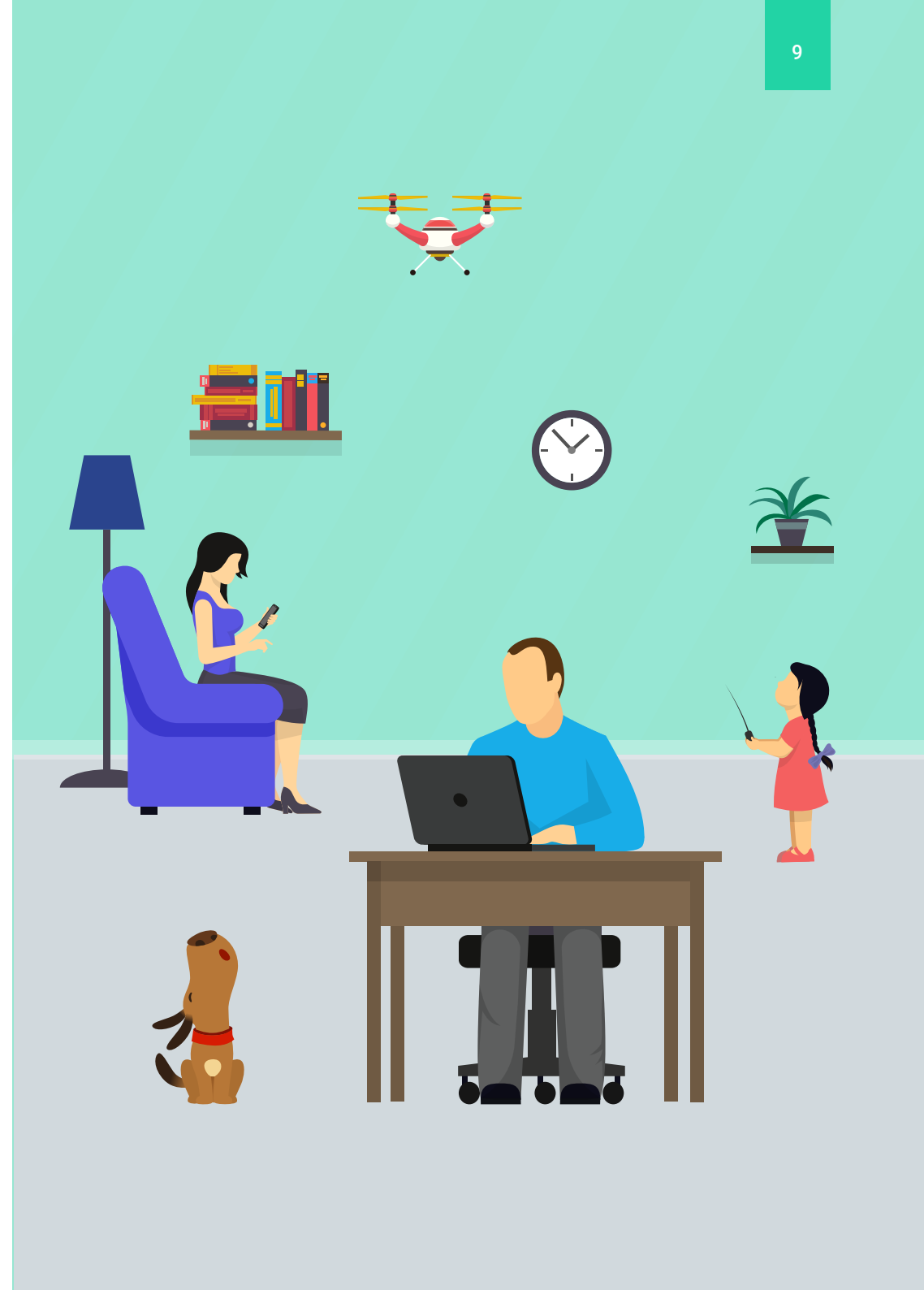


## Skills development for remote LEADERS

Leading a virtual team comes with its own set of challenges, so leaders need their share of training and support in order to develop the skills they need to navigate everything. Here are a few that should be included in any leadership development program:

When face to face interactions are no longer the default, it's crucial for remote leaders or managers to **clearly define the right team roles** and manage relationships between team members. Stress affects everyone and while the sudden move to an online work environment is certainly stressful, team leaders can still mediate plenty of issues.

Since many people share the working space with spouses, significant others, children, other family members or roommates, it may be impossible for them to keep a standard 9 to 5 work schedule. That's why virtual team leaders need to **focus more on goals instead of seat-time** and come up with strategies to achieve this balance between time and results.





With all communication happening online, team leaders need to take on the responsibility of **facilitating virtual meetings** effectively. They need to be clear on the regularity of some meetings, define the procedure for impromptu meetings, establish individual one-on-ones or group brainstorming sessions, and also set the guidelines on communication methods and channels for various types of meetings.

Inevitably, people react differently in virtual environments. Some can transition smoothly, others feel rather uncomfortable to be in front of the camera all day, others can have a hard time differentiating between working time and leisure time if they use the same apps constantly. Therefore, leaders need to **build a better team dynamic** by balancing employees' hyperactive and passive online behaviors.





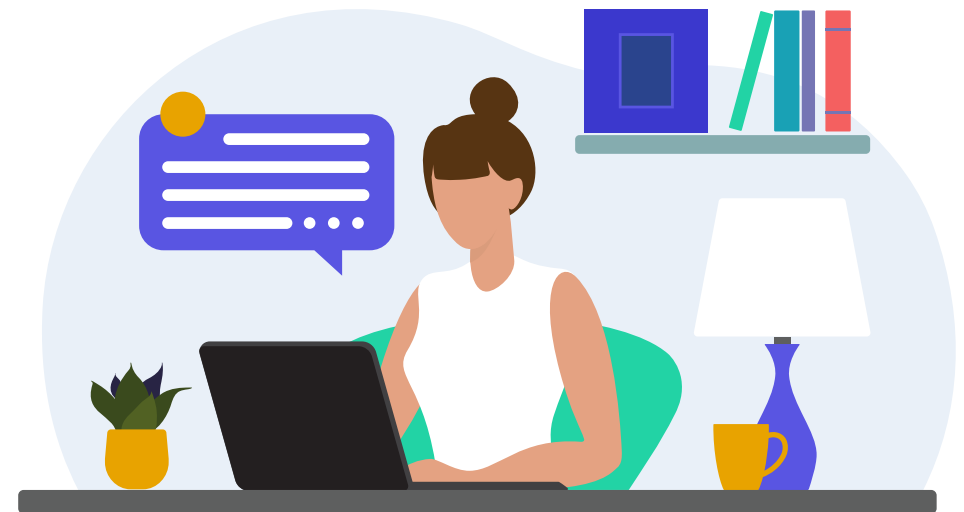
Feedback is as important as instruction or working time. It's really necessary for team leaders to **deliver frequent and specific feedback** to remote employees, adapted to each individual, and in various ways (online chats, audio recordings, or even videos). In this way, people can improve their performance and achieve their goals.

While technology does wonders for efficiency and better productivity, it also takes a toll on people's mental state. For teams to continue to function well as units, leaders must learn how to better support and **mentor soft skills**, such as empathy, agility, or resilience.

Virtual leaders also need to adapt to the realities of **onboarding new employees remotely**. For example, they should be trained on how to integrate clear introductions between the new employee and the existing team or teams, set up convenient and structured remote communication channels, and establish clear onboarding goals.

Finally, the endeavor of **building a culture of remote work** falls on leaders' shoulders. Cultural change is a lengthy and complex process, but with the right attitude, the right vision, and the right support, virtual team leaders can eventually achieve it.

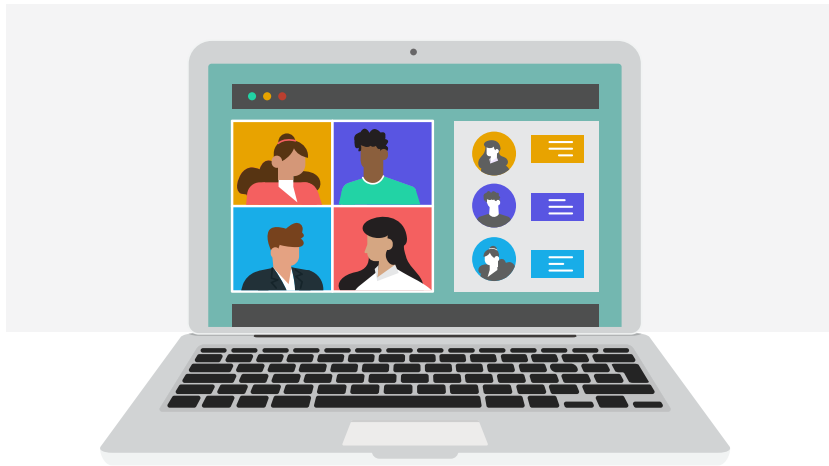
It's no secret that being a leader in today's dynamic organizational environment is more of a challenge than ever before. L&D specialists need to keep an eye on all changes and design skills development programs not only for employees but also for their leaders.



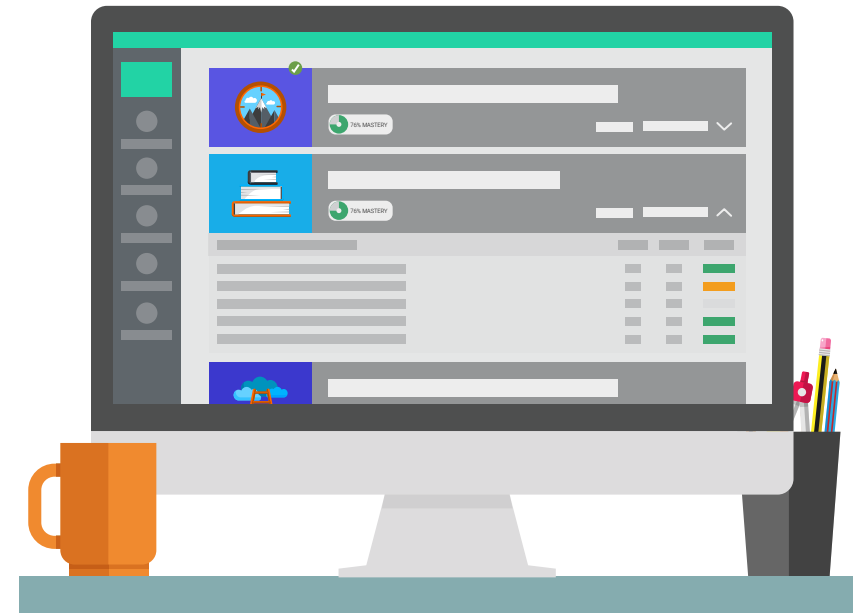
## The needed tools

Remote work and skills development can't possibly happen without technology. In dispersed organizations, every employee must be able to collaborate with their colleagues or work independently, depending on the circumstances. Here are four types of indispensable online tools that make remote work and talent development possible:

First of all, there are **project management and collaboration tools**. Without these, remote organizations run in the dark. They simplify working processes, keep people on the right track, and even improve productivity.



A **video-conferencing tool** is indispensable when face-to-face interaction is preferable. From welcoming new team members or introducing new projects, to giving feedback, or simply discussing specific tasks, the use of video conferencing on a regular basis enables more direct communication within remote teams.



E-learning **content providers** can help with developing on-demand online training resources for remote employees. These services can offer pre-built online training content or custom-made resources, allowing L&D specialists to deliver the most relevant content to learners.

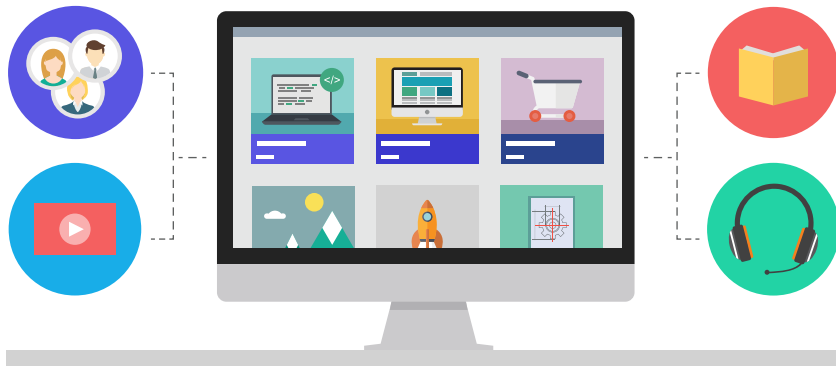
There are plenty of choices in terms of all these types of online tools, but there's always the possibility to have them all directly integrated within a **Learning Management System**, which is the most comprehensive training and development solution for remote workforces.

## Making the most of an LMS

Home offices will be increasingly popular in the future and the numbers of remote working employees will only go higher. While the logistics for efficiently performing the tasks have started to fall into place, company managers and L&D specialists need to focus on one very important aspect: **the way people will continue to learn and develop professionally.**

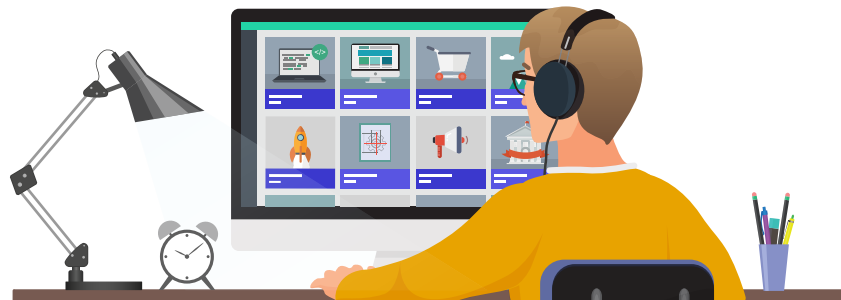
When the team is scattered in different locations and employees work mainly on their own hours, there's the need to mitigate all these differences and ensure continuous learning for everyone. A business Learning Management System (LMS) can overcome all the logistical obstacles and turn them into real opportunities.

The LMS is the critical component of the entire online skills development program, acting both as the foundation by incorporating all the training modules, and as the engine by providing the environment in which learners can access them and suggesting various topics based on curriculum and personal interest.



Choosing the right LMS will be critical to the success of all remote L&D initiatives. Here are some LMS capabilities that support the skills development of remote workers:

- A user-friendly and easily searchable environment where people can find information and resources when they need them;
- A collaborative space where employees can share their experiences and learn from each other;
- A system that offers great options to tailor an onboarding or a continuous training program for any necessity;
- A system that allows L&D professionals to upload ready-made modules as well as add updated or custom-made content when deemed necessary;
- A space where it's easy to have regular surveys and quizzes to see both what people are interested in and what skills they need to brush up on;
- A platform that is accessible on any kind of device and at any time;
- A comprehensive set of features that help with offering a personalized approach to learning (including, but not limited to: adaptive learning, progress tracking and evaluation, robust analytics, and reports).



The business LMS has evolved from being simply a useful tool for managing organizational learning into an essential corporate commodity. In the context of extended remote work, global teams, and a growing need for brevity, flexibility, and efficiency, having a good LMS will make the difference between companies who navigate changes successfully and those who struggle.

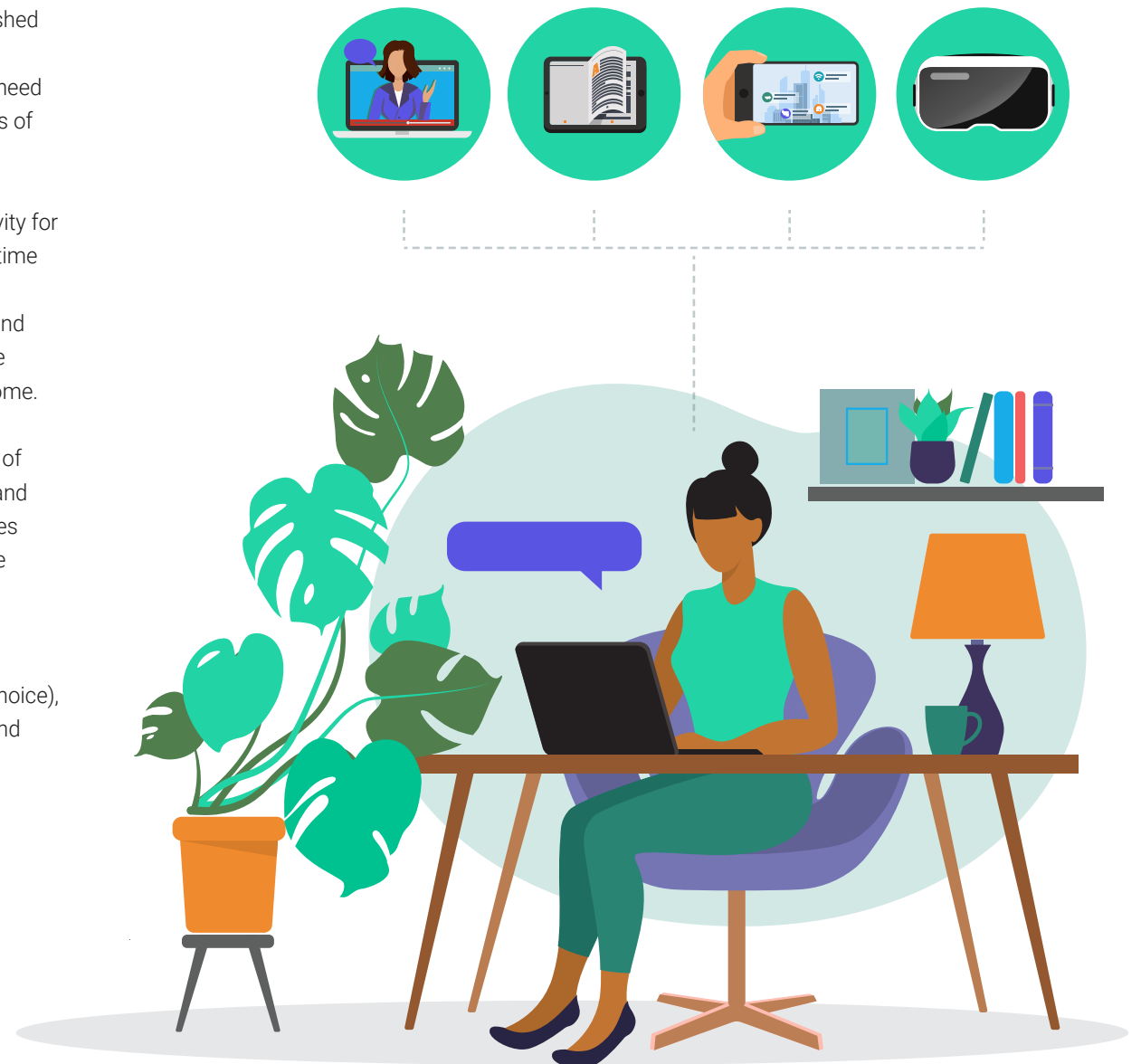
## Final tips for L&D professionals

Designing training modules for remote employees to keep their skills polished and develop new competencies comes with no text-book rules. Every organization is different, every learner is different, and L&D professionals need to balance many details when creating online courses that meet the needs of today's remote workforce.

The most important thing to always keep in mind when adapting any activity for online training is that online learning doesn't have to happen at the same time as online teaching. L&D designers need to avoid the tendency to make in-person behaviors and activities fit into a remote learning environment and **embrace the asynchronous mindset**. That is a fundamental shift from the face-to-face instructor-led training and it is what makes online L&D awesome.

The online learning environment offers a myriad of opportunities in terms of finding or creating the best learning experiences. Instructional designers and online trainers need to **be curious and experiment** with tools and strategies that can only happen online, such as simulations, webinars, ebooks, online workshops, and even AR and VR.

Last but not least, L&D specialists should **keep L&D efforts short** (try out microlearning and micro assessments) **easy to use** (an LMS is the best choice), **interactive** (multimedia works wonders), and **fun** (sprinkle some humor and some gamification elements here and there).



## Conclusion

Remote work has transformed overnight from an occasional perk to a (seemingly) permanent necessity. We can't predict how the business world will look a few months from now, but what is fairly certain is that digital transformation – which was well underway before the global health crisis - just got a huge boost and will not be reversed.

As a result, it is important to develop good digital training and skills development strategies for both employees and leaders of remote teams and prepare for the very near future. This way, a business will not only survive but will thrive in the face of adversity.

If you're looking for a tool to help you get started with your online training and skills development programs, try out CYPHER Learning, a learning management system for business organizations with a comprehensive set of features that support remote training. CYPHER Learning provides a fast solution to get started with e-learning and quickly set up an online training environment and provides all the essential tools and services companies need to move training activities online, while also making them more engaging and effective.

[www.cypherlearning.com](http://www.cypherlearning.com)

