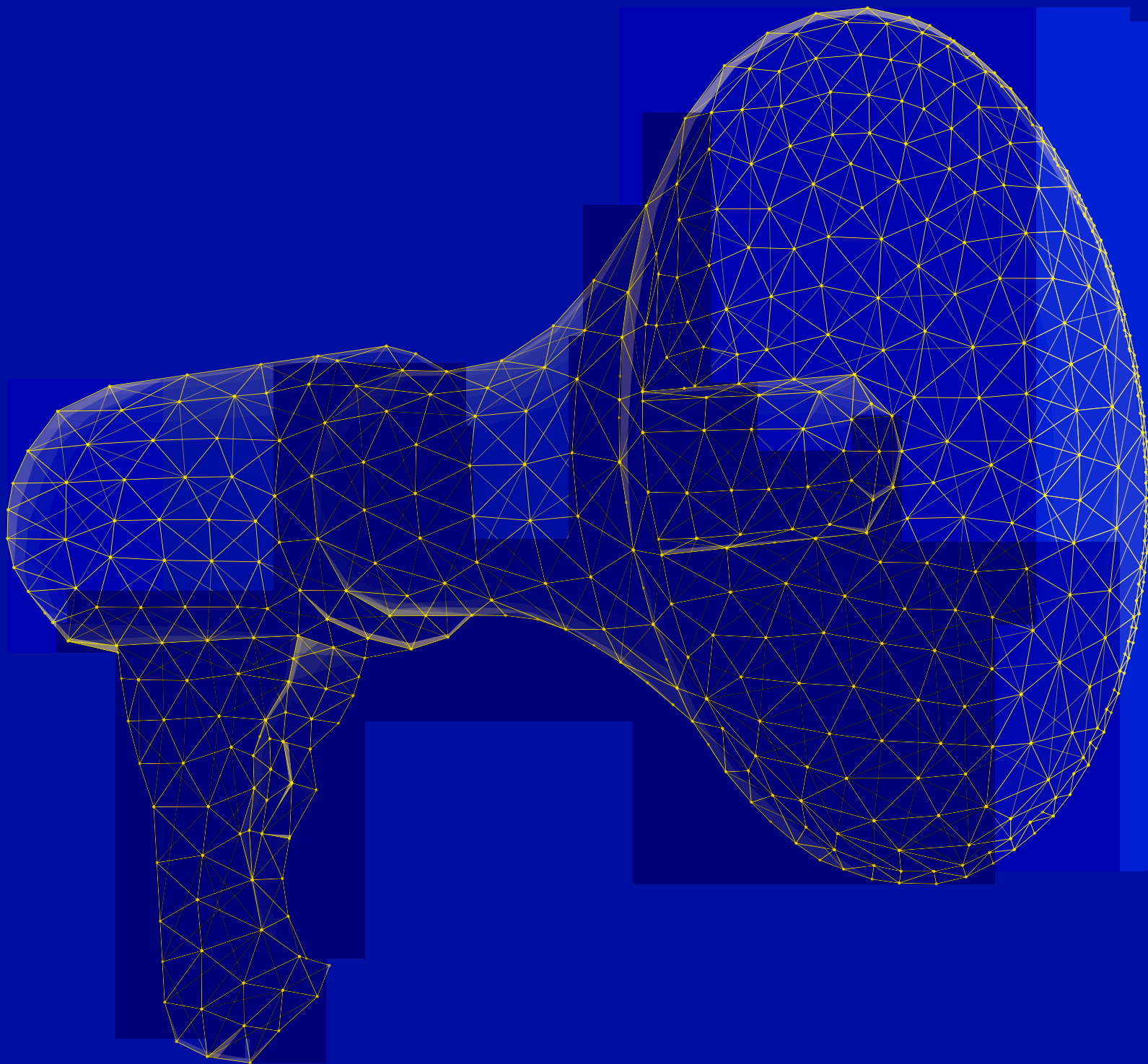




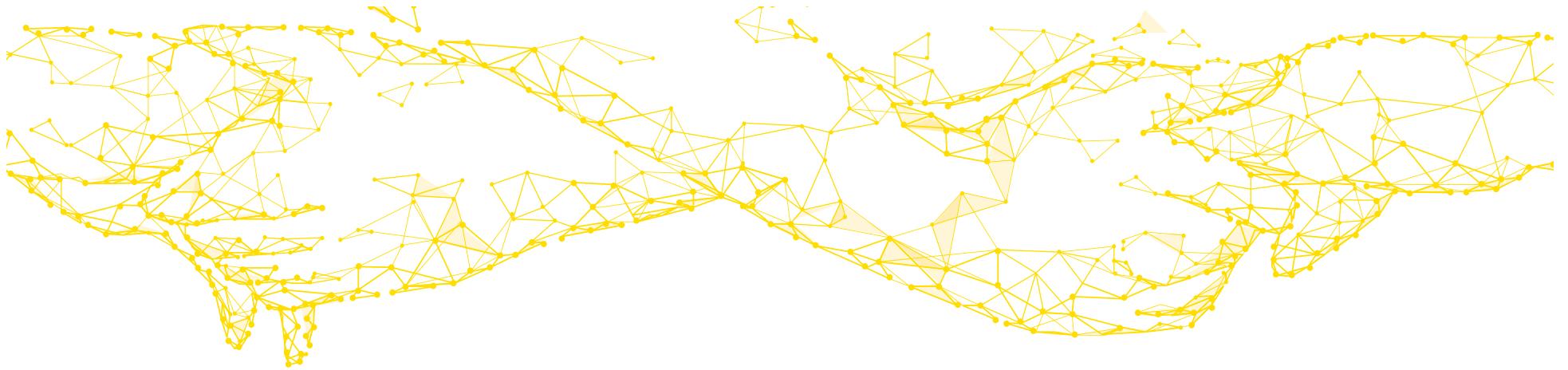
Why Should You Care About Collaborative Learning?



**Reason #1: When given the choice,
it's collaborative learning, by far.**



So, why should you care about collaborative learning?



You've already got an LMS. You deliver training through the classroom for its one-on-one impact, with some e-learning or VILT in the mix for topics that require broader, faster reach. But the outcomes and business impact just aren't there. Your organization is disappointed. Your learners are disappointed. You're disappointed.

Or maybe you're quite happy with your in-person programs but the budget is limiting your scale and impact.

Reason #1: your learners do! Sure, there are reports out there that say self-directed or classroom training is the most preferred by learners, but those reports don't even offer collaborative online learning as an option. When given the choice, it's collaborative learning, by far.

When given the choice, it's collaborative learning, by far.

Additional reasons? Collaborative learning maps to brain science (like the higher levels of Five Moments of Need and Bloom's Taxonomy), to human nature (social relationships), and to how work gets done (in teams). And it's not the same experience as just bolting a discussion forum to your LMS or

e-learning module. The benefits of switching to a collaborative online learning modality are big, fast, and business-based.

So let's dig in. Because as you know, between digital disruption, the increased pace of business change, and increased employee turnover rates, learning challenges tasked with organizational

solutions are coming at you with some very high stakes indeed (by which we mean outcomes upon which the business is depending for its future and success).

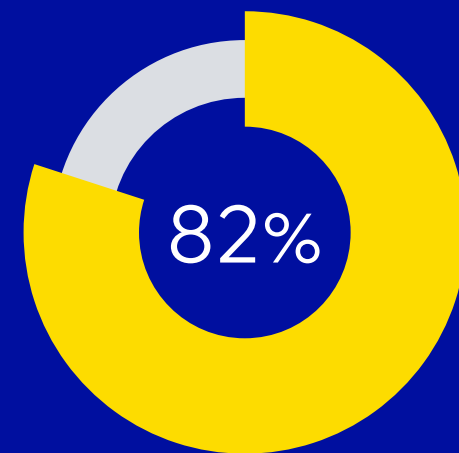
Collaborative Learning is Rated Best for High-Stakes Learning (and Isn't All Learning High-Stakes for Businesses These Days?)

In 2019, a survey of more than 1000 learners and 400 Chief Learning Officers (CLOs) revealed that "learning with/from others" (i.e. collaborative learning) was respondents' most preferred method of learning.

For learners, this was regardless of the type of learning last delivered by their organizations. Collaborative learning was also selected by CLOs as the type of learning that provides the most value (82%), despite the fact that most still deliver their training via the classroom (87%).

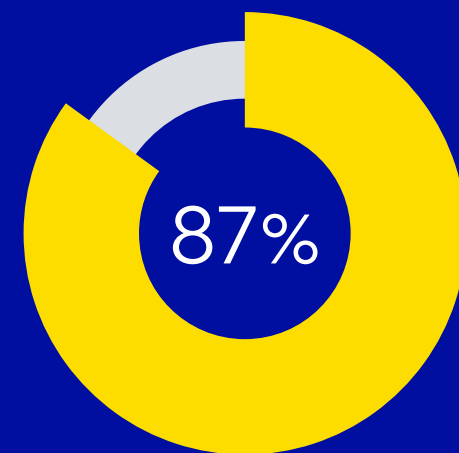
Another data point, from GP Strategies 2019 Voice of the Learner report: "More than 70% of respondents want to learn with someone else...Technology can be an enabler of learning and the human connection."

"While a variety of interactive options can help facilitate learning, it is the interaction and guidance from other human beings that makes for a memorable learning experience."



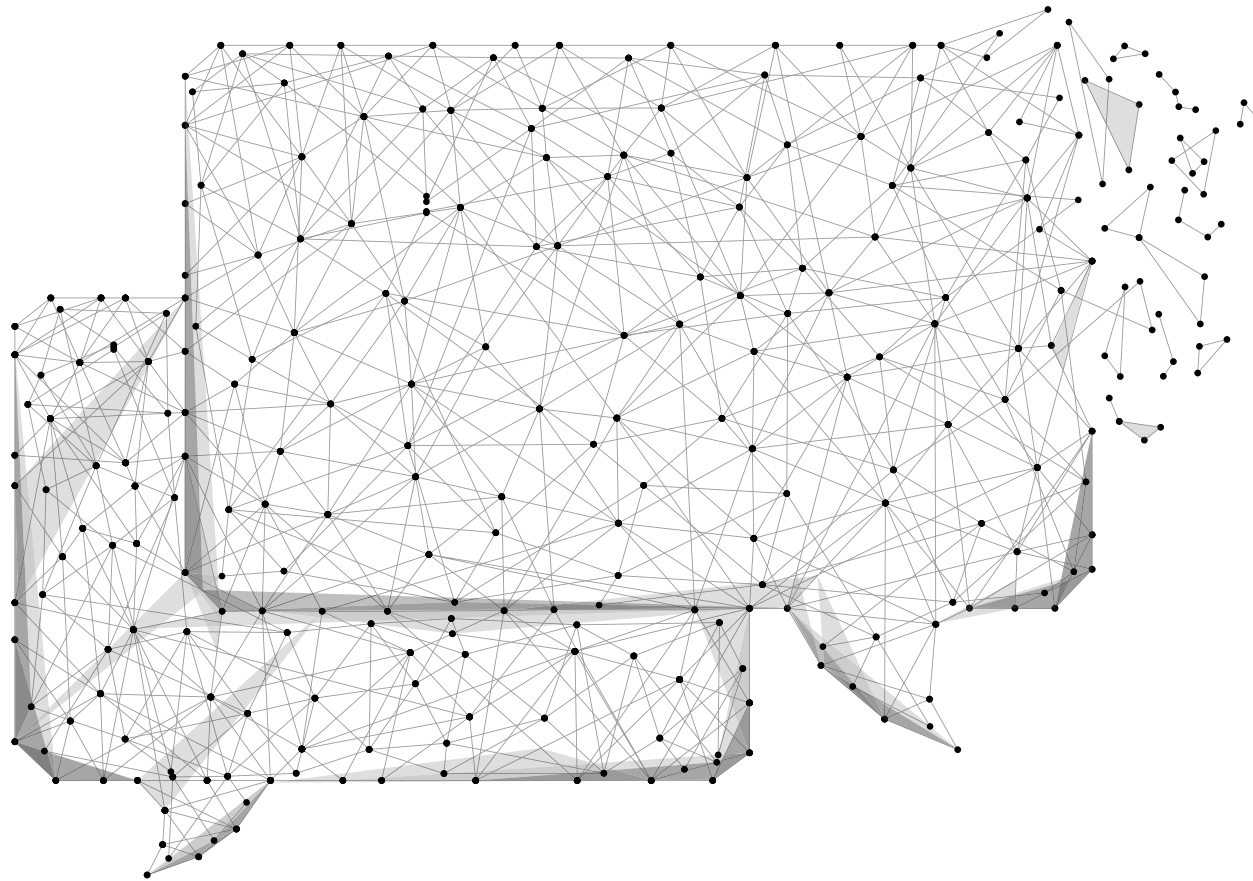
of CLOs select collaborative as the type of learning that provides the most value

DESPITE THIS



of CLOs still deliver their training via the classroom

At Its Core, Collaborative Learning Is...



Collaborative learning is an experience:

- that leverages the best of classroom learning and e-learning delivery, without their respective downsides
- where learners are providing crowd-sourced content as part of the course
- within which learners are motivated by, challenged by, and encouraged by, peers as well as mentors or subject matter experts
- where learners solve business-related problems together and create usable outputs
- that you can't successfully go through without interacting with other people
- where human-to-human connection (via engaging technology) is the backbone of the experience
- that mirrors everyday workflow and work habits (like teamwork and asking questions of peers)

Aligned to Learner Moments of Need and Bloom's Taxonomy

There are five moments of need in each successful learning experience, according to taxonomy creators Bob Mosher and Conrad Gottfredson.

The Five Moments of Need are:

New

learning how to do something for the first time

More

expanding the breadth and depth of what they have learned

Apply

acting upon what has been learned, including planning or adapting to a unique situation

Solve

using new knowledge when problems arise or when things don't work as intended

Change

a change in skills or habits that are deeply ingrained in their practices

Each of these sequential moments of need must be met in order for learners to internalize the new materials so that they become a part of daily habits.

Collaborative learning meets all Five Moments of Need, with a particular focus on the need to apply, solve, and change, while other traditional corporate learning methodologies stop at new and more.

Because the steps of applying and solving are done socially in collaborative learning, participants aren't just turning in work that shows how they could apply skills or solve a problem. They are instead actively learning and receiving feedback on their work from peers, which deepens their understanding of the materials and greatly improves the chances of change, where these new skills become internalized and part of learners' new reality.

Collaborative learning goes beyond meeting the Five Moments of Need. It also elevates learning in accordance to Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Learning.

First created in 1956 under the leadership of educational psychologist Dr. Benjamin Bloom, Bloom's Taxonomy promotes higher forms of thinking in education over rote learning and remembering facts. It starts similarly to the Five Moments of Need: level one is remembering (recalling facts), level two is understanding (explaining concepts) – level two is, again, is where most e-Learning stops – while level three is applying (using information in situations), which some, but not all event-based learning manages to achieve.

Levels four, five, and six (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) emphasize the ability to draw connections among various ideas, justify one's stance or decision, and the production of new or original work that uses the information.

Collaboration elevates learning quickly and easily to the higher levels of learning outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy by introducing group problem-solving, peer evaluation and the creation by groups of original works as a regular part of the collaborative experience.

The thinking skills which rank higher on Bloom's taxonomy, such as applying, analyzing, and creating, are difficult to achieve in solitary settings. Collaborative learning emphasizes group-driven learning in which knowledge application is enhanced by the added perspectives of fellow learners. When applying knowledge as part of a team, such as when groups must solve problematic scenarios together, learners must debate ideas, address assumptions, present alternatives, and defend their perspectives to fellow learners. This demands a deeper understanding of concepts than simply remembering and understanding what they are. When these collaborations occur, new concepts are being internalized and can be applied more readily and more regularly by learners.

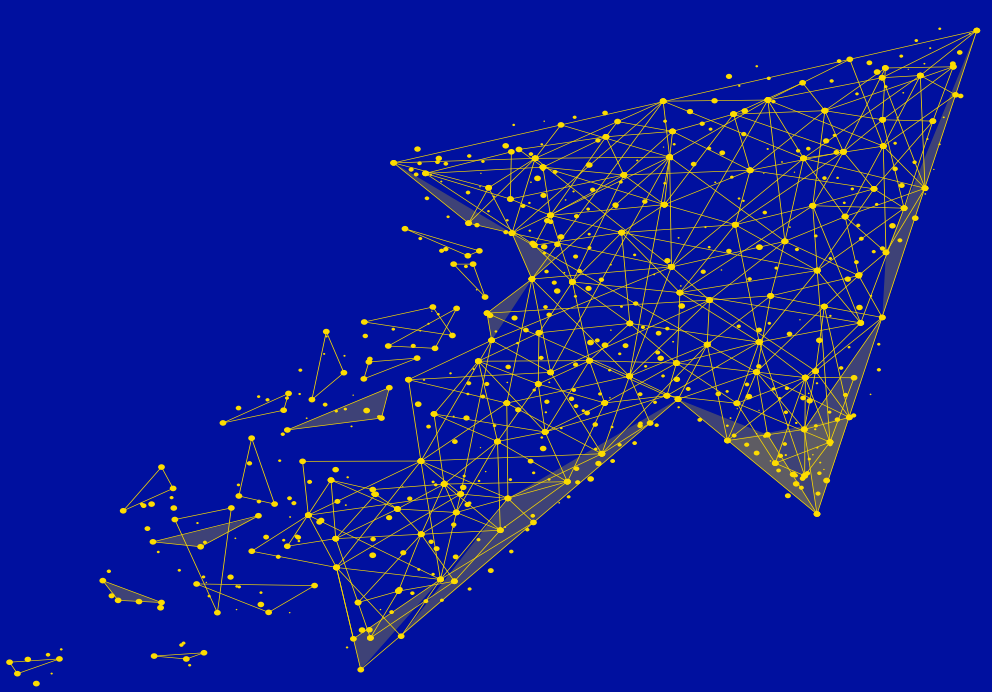
Benefits of Collaborative Learning: The Business's POV

Too often still, the goal of corporate learning is just to show completion marks in the LMS. Collaborative learning can achieve the same cognitive results as other forms of learning while simultaneously improving learners' soft skills, increasing their investment in the organization's success, and elevating learning to a deeper, internalized level that yields real business results in the long run. Sounds more like the outcomes your high-stakes challenges are seeking to achieve, doesn't it!

The 2019 State of High-Stakes Learning survey revealed that two of the highest-stakes business training initiatives facing organizations in the next two years are building leadership and management skills

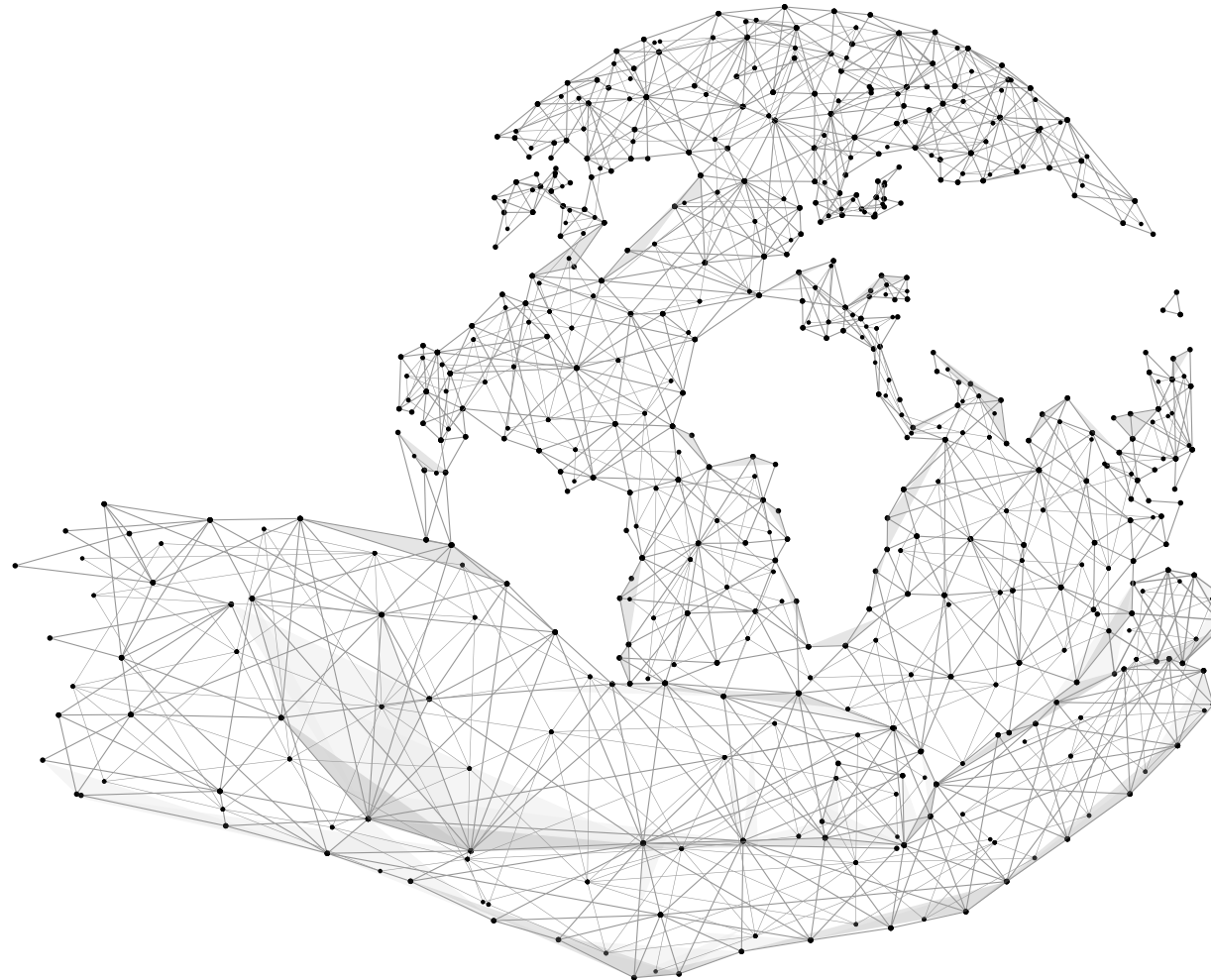
within the organization and increasing soft skills and communication skills. Yet survey respondents felt that their organizations were frequently unable to tackle these critical initiatives.

One survey respondent summed it up well by saying, "If the organization helps me grow, I'll help grow the organization." Unprepared, undereducated employees can't hit the ground running when change happens – which is exactly what's needed for swift organizational change to be successful. And, the more that employees have connected with each other and feel invested in by the company, the more likely they are to be motivated to really help the organization succeed.



**"If the organization
helps me grow,
I'll help grow
the organization."**

Global Connections Without A Plane Ticket



Imagine deeper-level learning available to employees all over the world, but without increased costs that would be associated with each of them attending in-person learning events. Glean similar organizational benefits as would result from an international workshop or conference without the costs of gathering everyone in one place. An online collaborative learning environment can achieve similar results while also extending learning over a longer period of time for deeper internalized learning and reinforcement.

This is, of course, the same age-old appeal of e-Learning: more learners, fewer dollars spent. Yet unlike individualized LMS-deployed modules, online collaborative learning environments flourish from connecting a wide range of international and globally diverse participants with the depth of a classroom experience, coupled with the convenience of online learning, without the downsides of either traditional modality.

But What About Content Aggregator Platforms and LMSs? They Have Collaborative Features Don't They?

But content aggregation platforms perpetuate the problems of content-focused learning. These useful but limited solutions exclude collaborative, contextual elements through which skill transformation takes root. Unlike content-focused methodologies in which learners listen passively, absorb content, and then take a validating quiz, collaborative learning helps learners move beyond memory games and into accountability. They help employees move from theory and regurgitation to real understanding and on-the-job application.

Accountability breeds transformation. It's the same reason many people join book clubs: knowing that others are paying attention and expecting engagement greatly raises the chances of both completing the material and thinking about it in a deeper, more thoughtful way. Engaging with others' around perspectives which may be wildly different than one's own accelerates the shift from "something read" to "something learned," and creates a richer, more transformative experience than content absorption alone can provide. Just like a book club, the peer-to-peer contextual learning experience is as important as the content itself.

Content has had a lot of rigor in the learning industry. Now, collaborative methodologies ask for the same

rigor around context, which, thanks to technology, can be achieved at a grander scale than ever before.

And though an LMS might have a discussion forum bolted on, or an e-learning module might be "gamified" in some way, that's not real collaborative learning. Collaborative online learning is both a technology, and an approach, a modality. The program designers must bear collaboration in mind and weave it into the very fabric of the course itself. Having a discussion forum with a vague hope that people will use it because it's there just doesn't cut it in the modern highly-distracted and time-starved worklives of learners. It has to be ruthlessly relevant, required for both completion and understanding, and engaging.

Giving learners a Facebook- or Twitter-esque way to voice their opinions can be useful, but it's not collaborative. It creates a series of monologues piled up on each other rather than a dialogue between peers. Learners' opinions won't be changed or improved simply by posting what they are, and posting individual opinions is not the same as working together to understand concepts, which broadens learners' perspectives and teaches important soft skills.

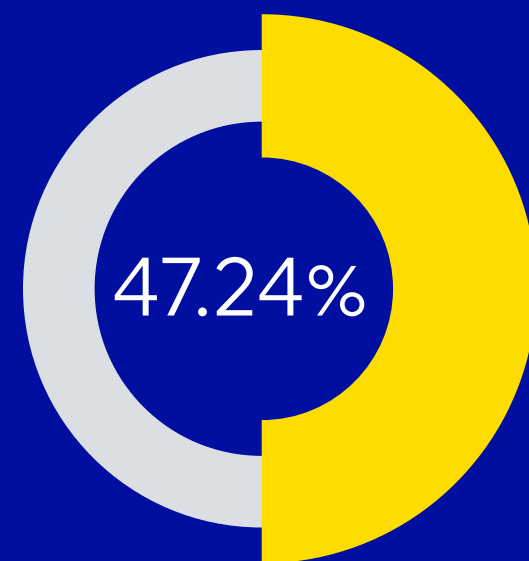
Unprecedented Learning at Scale

E-learning is self-paced and content-driven. Like reading a book, e-learning is about getting what is needed from the content (and maybe skipping a few sections) before retiring it to a shelf. In contrast, the handiest metaphor of collaborative learning is like being in a book club which promotes discussion, connection of high-level ideas, and accountability. Collaborative learning is cohort-driven, and context-rich. And that means an easy leap to both real understanding (not just regurgitation for a quiz) and application back on the job (something the survey learners said they're not doing much of. Nearly half (47.24%) of learners say they are applying the learning from their last professional development opportunity at work "A few times but not frequently." Nearly 10% said they're not applying the learning on the job at all, while at the other end of the scale, a mere 10.55% say they use the learning daily. Only 33.01% of respondents are using their learning "a few times a month.")

It's well-known that any online-accessible learning is going to be more available to more people than an in-person learning event. But with individual online learning, such as what is provided by libraries (think Lynda.com), the learning stops when the course stops – and it stops with that individual learner. Collaborative learning has a very long tail; its social impact on learners means that learning continues even after the administered learning journey is concluded. Collaborative learning's emphasis on soft skills and internalization of concepts means learners

will be practiced in sharing new knowledge with team members while actively applying it to real-life scenarios.

Because of this, collaborative learning experiences are ideal for spreading knowledge beyond the simplistic skill-building courses seen in e-Learning. Consider collaborative learning environments an opportunity to cascade higher-level skills and higher-level information throughout your organization, insights that might historically be exclusive to managers or the C-suite alone. It's a great way to increase overall employee alignment to business goals and expectations at all levels of the organization.

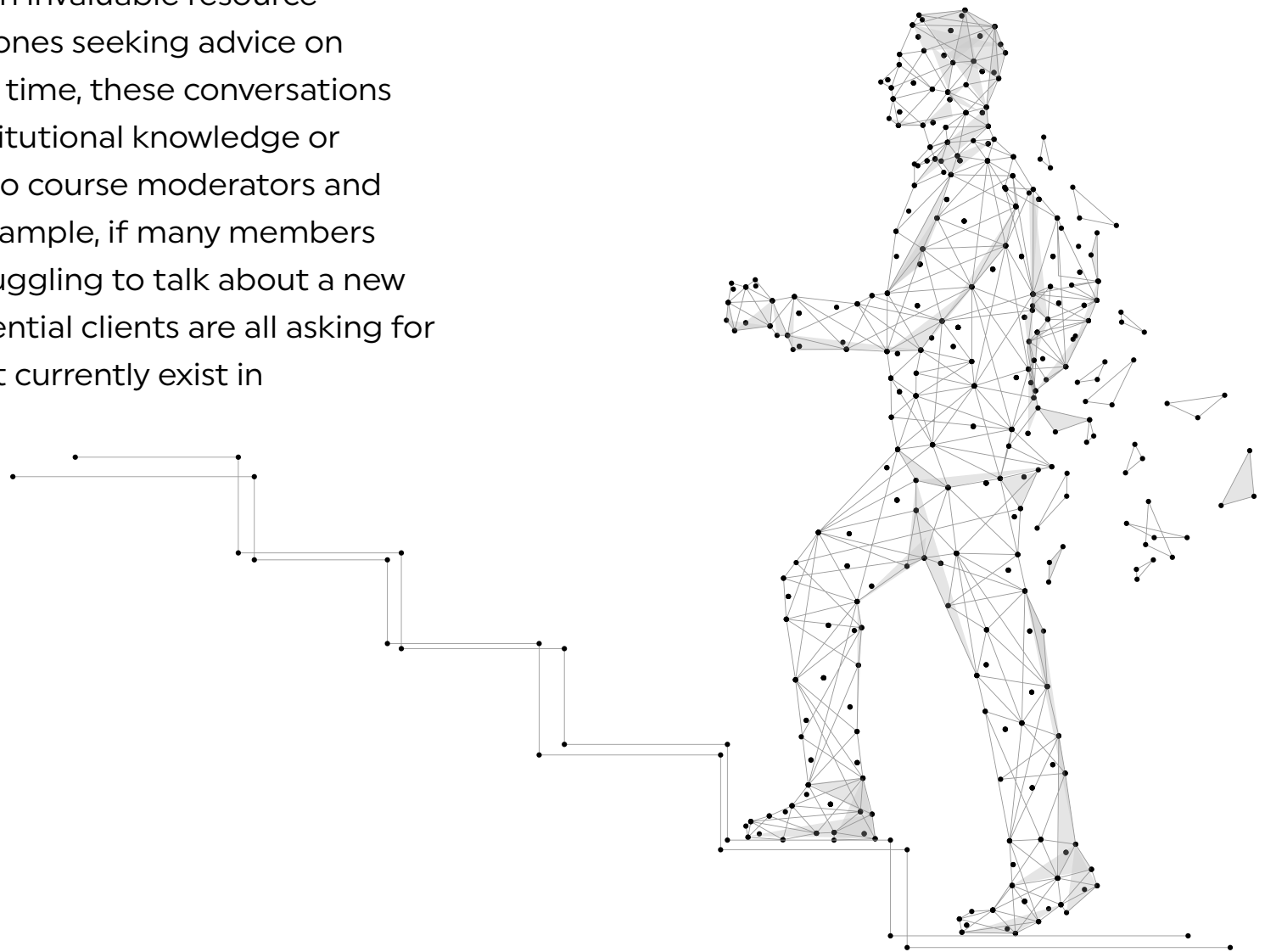


**of learners say they are applying
the learning from their last
professional development**

Cost-Effective Expansion of Institutional Knowledge

Collaborative learning also prevents knowledge from walking out the door when someone quits, moves branches, or changes positions within the company.

Online collaborative learning environments provide a new and exciting way to capture and track institutional knowledge. Archived digital conversations can be an invaluable resource for new employees or ones seeking advice on niche problems. In real time, these conversations may reveal gaps in institutional knowledge or market opportunities to course moderators and administrators. (For example, if many members of a sales team are struggling to talk about a new product or if their potential clients are all asking for a feature that does not currently exist in the product.)



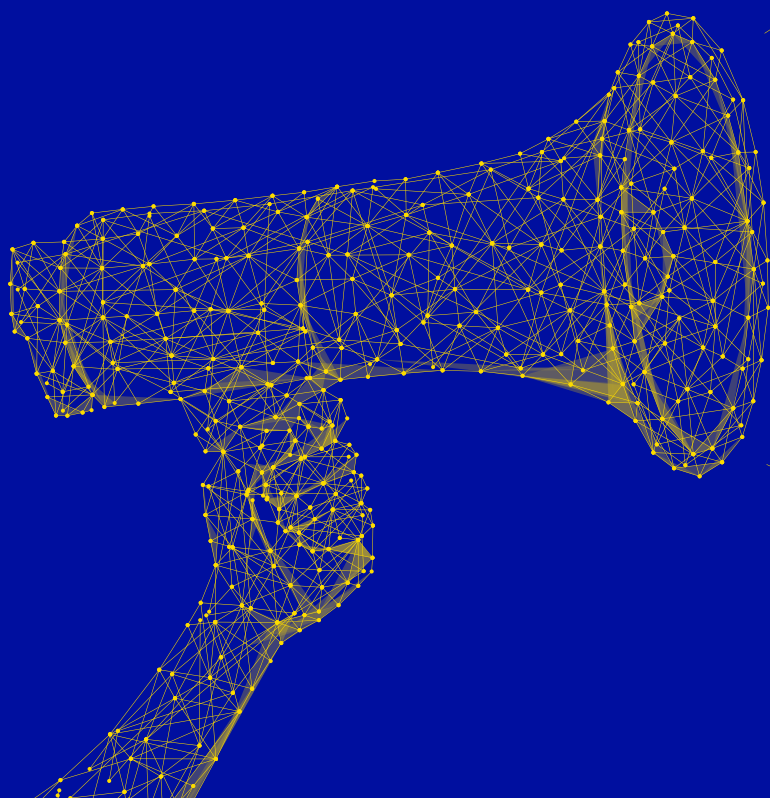
Goal-based Collaborative Learning Experiences

Rather than limiting its scope to building individual's rote knowledge, collaborative goal-based learning centers around accomplishing a specific business goal together. Increasing knowledge may be a small part of achieving a specified goal, but it's rarely the whole picture. The goal is not "learn more" or "pass this quiz" (looking at you, e-Learning!), but is instead a higher-level business challenge in which learning with and from each other plays an essential role in success or achievement of the goal, an actionable outcome.

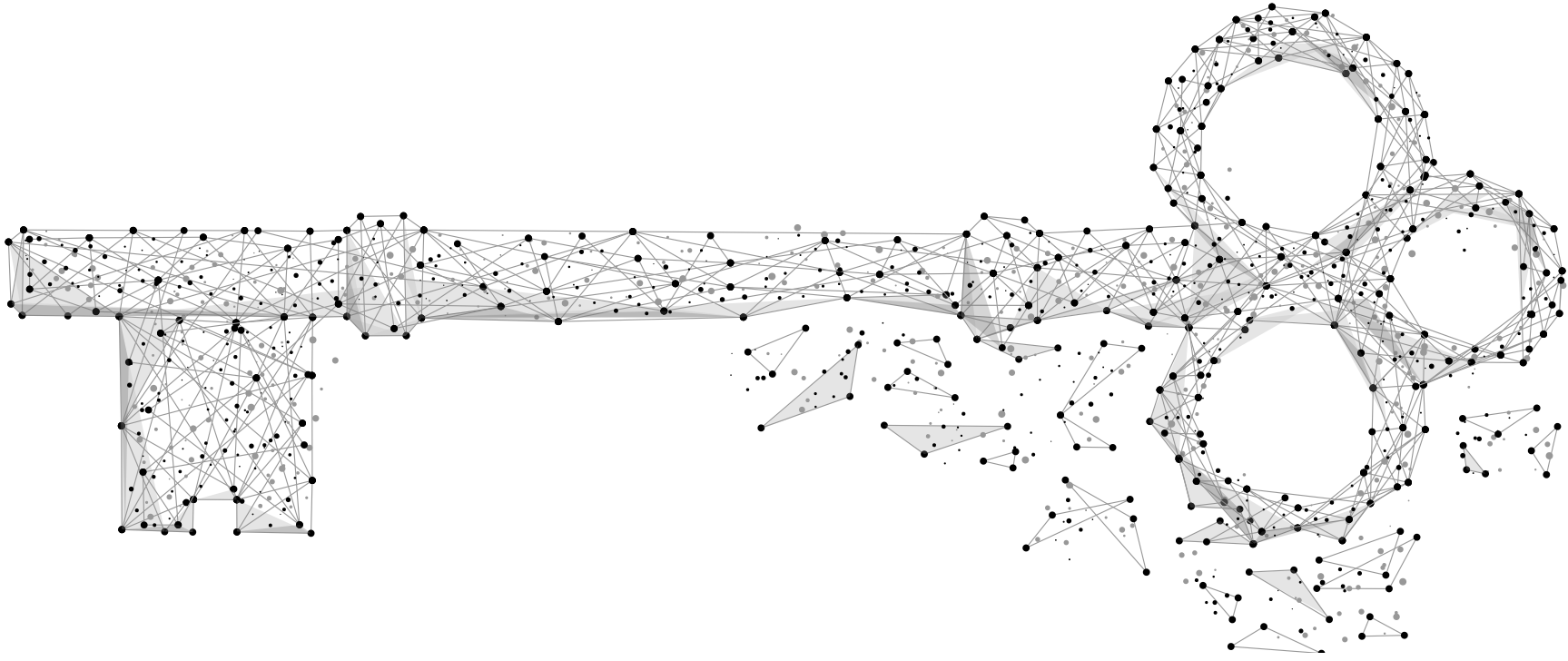
Goal-based learning asks, "what gets us to the goal?" If the goal is to increase the sales of a product line, course designers might identify that the sales people:

- need to ask pointed questions that uncover customers' needs
- need to better propose why the product suits the customers' needs
- need to know how to emphasize the benefits that matter most to the customer during the sales process.

Although the salespeople will, of course, need to know details of the product line in order to achieve this goal too, collaborative learning can answer that additional need for increased soft skills, interpersonal skills, and the ability to connect products to a prospect's particular challenges.



**Goal-based learning asks,
"what gets us to the goal?"**



Collaborative learning is an ideal method for goal-based learning initiatives. Imagine trying to learn interpersonal skills by yourself, with no interactions with others. It just wouldn't be as effective as learners working together on difficult selling scenarios, giving each other personalized feedback, and sharing perspectives of how to approach new clients and their specific foibles and needs.

Some other examples of collaborative learning with immediate application on-the-job:

- A discussion forum used by mid-management personnel for getting advice from global peers in which monthly scenario-based exercises are explored together, solved by groups, and reviewed by other groups — bonus: more junior team members will learn through the process who they can go to later for specific niche knowledge when opportunities or challenges arise
- A course on soft skills which members of a department complete together that includes milestone assignments in which participants report how newly-learned skills were implemented in real life, and the outcomes
- A sales enablement course with each week's assignment relating to building out aspects of a sales plan for a specific real-life opportunity, so that the end of the course, the learner not only has sharper sales skills, but has created an immediately actionable opportunity plan.

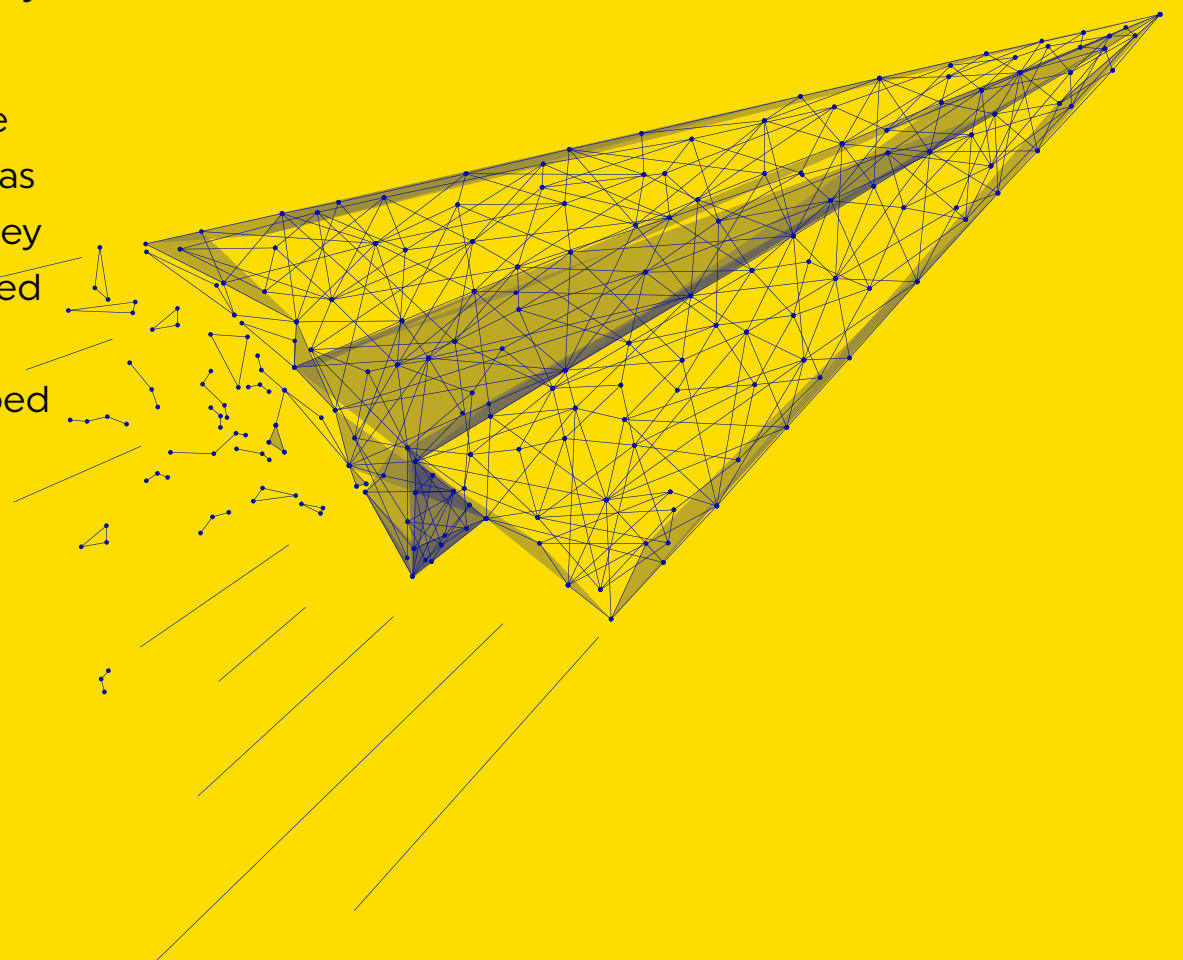
Achieving business goals requires much more than increased cognitive knowledge. By working together, learners' interpersonal skills will improve and the chances of accomplishing complicated business goals greatly increases.

Cohort-based Learning

Cohort-based learning is a fantastic way to simulate what is considered the main benefit of in-person or event-based learning, in which camaraderie forms as a result of a group going through a learning experience together.

In cohort-based collaborative learning, learners are placed in groups (cohorts) that complete a specific, mapped learning experience together over time. This makes it easier to get to know fellow learners on a personal level, and to build relationships that will endure beyond the limits of the learning experience. This creates a more engaging learning experience overall and increases learners' sense of accountability to their peers. Plus, it mirrors the reality of working life for most employees, who are part of larger teams whether they work in close proximity to each other in shared office spaces or cubicle groups, or remotely across a country or the globe.

In many cases, cohorts stay in contact and continue their conversations after the learning experience has concluded, ultimately acting like alumni groups. They continue to support each other, provide personalized advice, and keep the peer-to-peer collaborative learning experience going even after their prescribed learning journey has concluded.



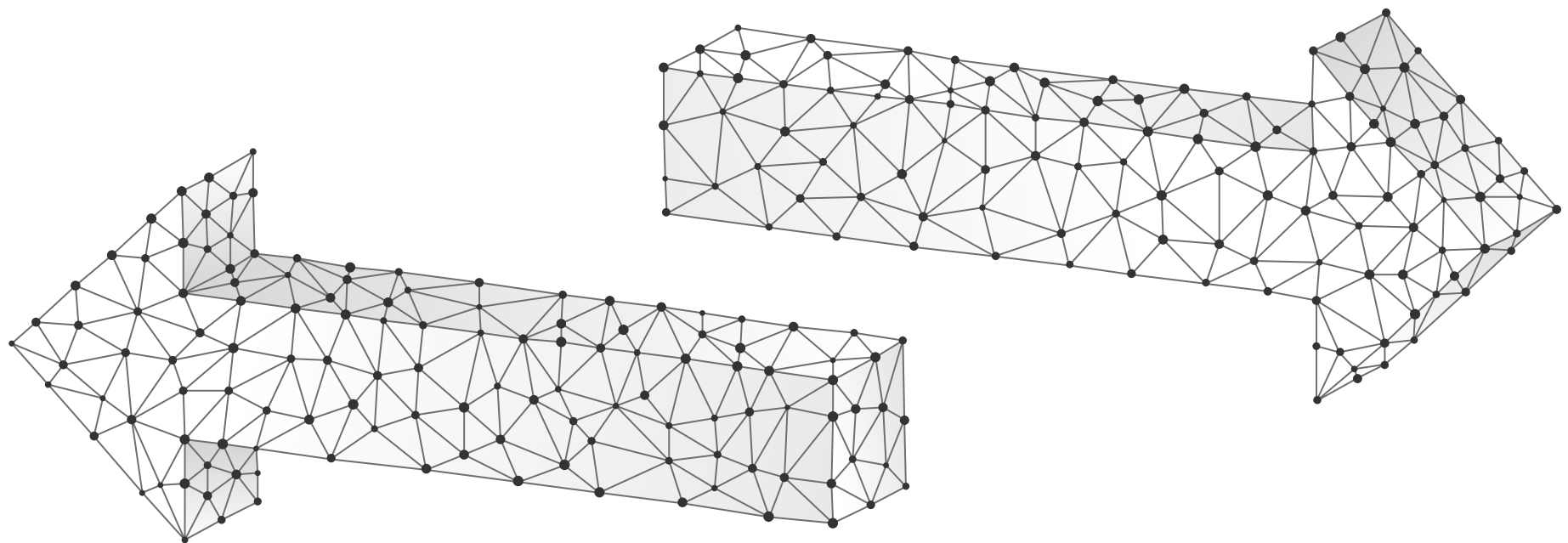
Collaborative Learning Necessitated by Organizational Change

Organizational change is only successful when individual change occurs. When large-scale organizational change happens, learning is no longer about developing a new skill, but is about educating on a new perspective and a new way of doing business.

There's an extensive amount of research on learning's role in organizational change management (you can even get a master's degree in Learning and Organizational Change). As such, this complex topic can't be covered in-depth here, so we'll just say this: collaborative learning in the face of change can build a vital camaraderie between colleagues, can establish and enforce new norms and expectations within the

organization, and can establish a new way of doing – something an one-time training event or e-learning module can't easily accomplish.

People learn better and faster when they learn with and from each other. Change is hard enough to go through without doing it alone! By providing collaborative environments and exercises where people must invest in new concepts together and evaluate each other's perspectives for accuracy, a culture of accountability will develop that will accelerate learners' adoption of the organization's new reality.



Benefits of Collaborative Learning: The Learner's POV

Consumer Technology Sets the Standard

Consumer technology evolves rapidly. It can be hard to keep up! It can be equally hard to tell which features are momentary trends versus which will change society's standards of technology forever. Not too long ago, many theorized that text messaging would be a passing fad. Now, texting and messaging are primary modes of communication for many people (and many millennials won't answer phone calls at all). Yet a similar feature, the early 2000s "Push-to-Talk" feature which turned flip phones into Walkie-Talkies that didn't use up limited phone minutes (remember those? no?), has largely died out.

Which features or capabilities catch on in consumer technology ultimately determine expectations for how other technologies should act or function, including learning technologies. L&D professionals must balance learners' expectations around technology with what is necessary in order to meet learning objectives. Learners may not need a profile picture next to

their discussion board posts in order for the posting functionality to work, but learners expect it to be there and might consider it a detractor from their learning experience if it is not. The same goes with the ability to create group chat threads, upload video, or respond in-line with others' comments: it's a buzzkill for the learners if the technology doesn't meet their expectations and when they can't easily engage with the learning or fellow learners due to absent features and functionalities.

Unfortunately, under the pressures of meeting these technological expectations, some L&D professionals purchase platforms or SaaS solutions that offer Facebook-like functionalities or a Twitter-imitating UI despite that they don't enhance the actual learning part of the learning experience. While these features are important, without a broader collaborative approach behind their use, they can undermine the opportunity for deeper learning by overriding learners' opportunities and motivation to collaborate.

It can be equally hard to tell which features are momentary trends versus which will change society's standards of technology forever.

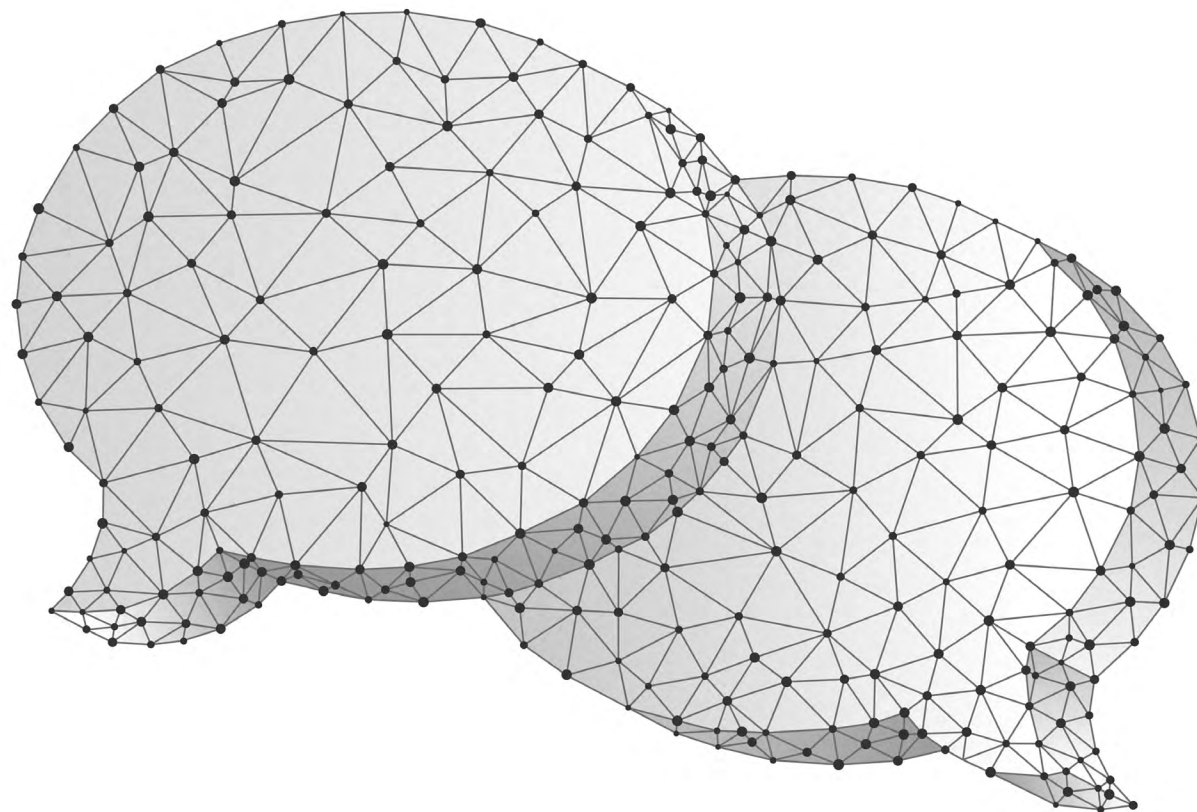
Enables access to expertise and feedback

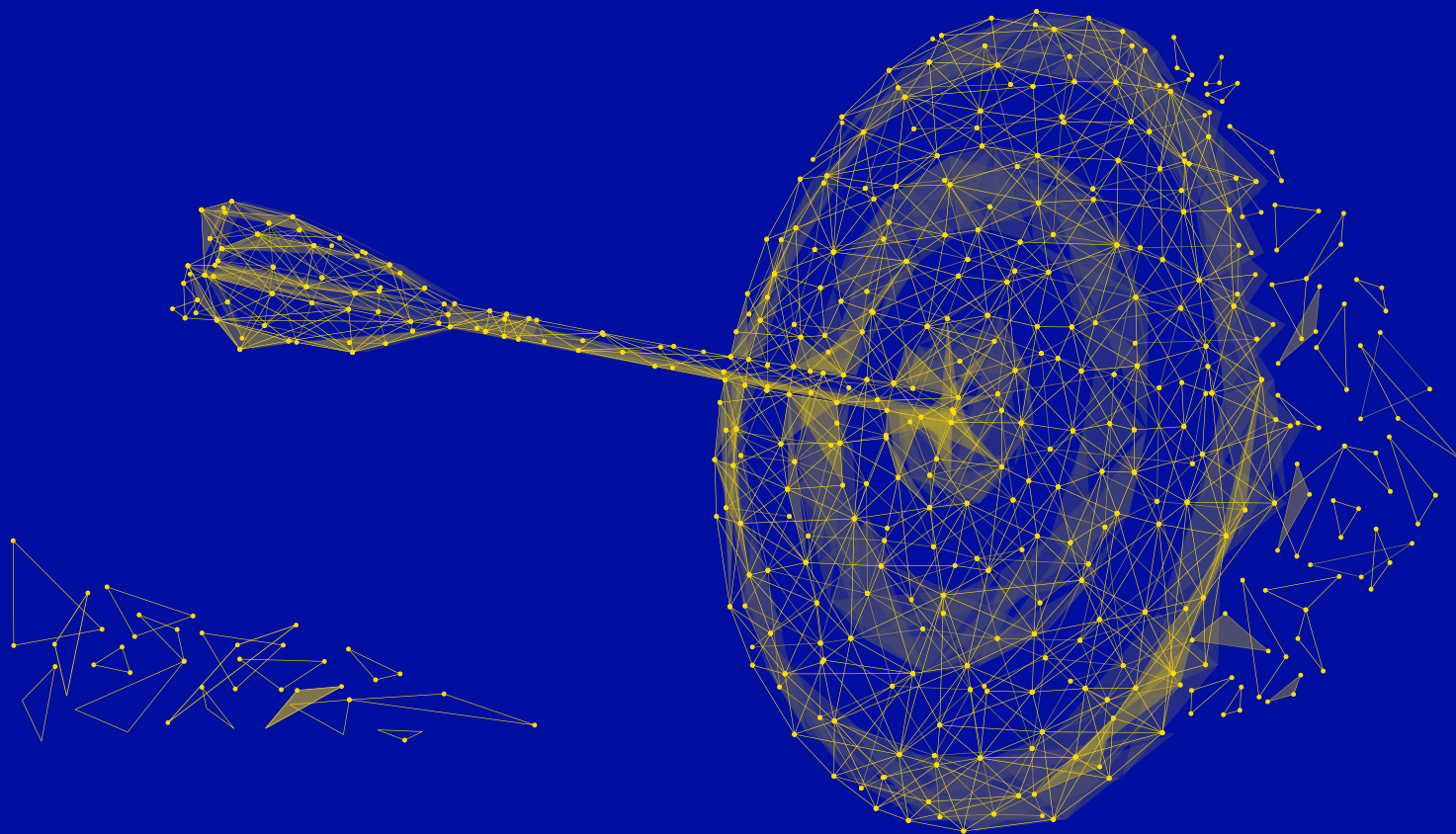
Technology-based collaborative learning exposes learners to more of their peers' points-of-view than is possible during event-based learning, where a learner's exposure is limited to which attendees are in their immediate vicinity. Depending on how the collaborative learning elements of the course are designed, learners will interact with a wider number of their cohorts members than would be accomplished through the limits of table-based, geography-based or proximity-based interactions (here's hoping you didn't sit at the wrong table...).

Furthermore, online environments can help bring to light the opinions of quieter learners or English as a Second Language learners who may be uncomfortable speaking off-the-cuff during event-based or in-person learning.

Their avenues and abilities to interact with their peers in a comfortable way is broadened by technology. This ultimately enriches the collaborative exercises and learning experience overall, allowing a broader variety of learners to actively participate at any given time.

Another benefit of technology-based collaborative learning is how much easier it is to catalogue and keep the results of collaborative learning exercises than it is to do so during event-based learning. With the addition of a search feature, learners can browse records of discussions, exercises, and group-created solutions as part of their learning process – even if completed by a different cohort or at a different time.





Context vs. Content

It's difficult for learners to apply knowledge on the job when content is lacking varied contexts. Like trying to parallel park for the first time after reading about it in a book (but never having tried it in real life), book smarts do not necessarily translate to successful skills application!

Your learning program may have the very best content in the world, crafted by expert content designers. But when what's taught isn't being actively practiced within an applicable, real-world context, it can only be learned at a rudimentary level.

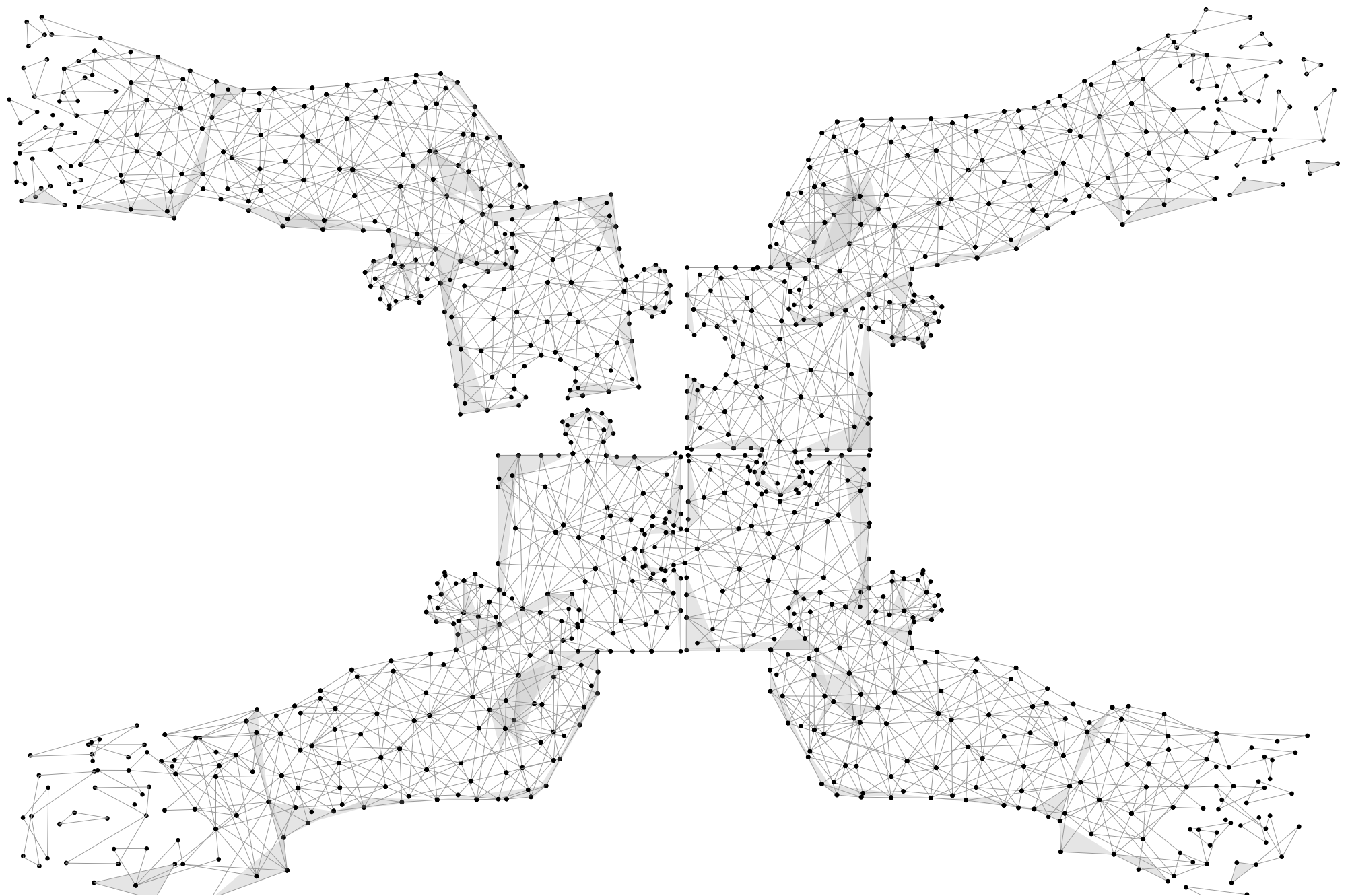
Bloom's taxonomy places cognitive knowledge (remembering and understanding) at the lowest levels of higher-order thinking skills. Despite its low ranking, this is the typical "success" organizations claim from e-Learning tactics, thanks primarily to that deceptive "completed" mark that appears in the LMS after a learner passes a quiz. Are learners who focus on remembering and understanding new concepts in order to pass a quiz really internalizing new knowledge? The data says no. A 2019 survey of learners revealed that employees are not applying newly learned knowledge at work: nearly half of respondents said they use new knowledge from their last organization-sponsored learning less than a few times a month, and nearly 10% admitted they hadn't applying the learning on the job at all.

One reason for this lack in knowledge application may be that translating cognitive knowledge into actionable, real-world skills can be difficult. However, it is much easier to do precisely that when the context through which the knowledge was learned mirrors the learners' day-to-day reality, including working with others, connecting concepts to unexpected scenarios, and creating organic content that utilizes new knowledge – which is exactly what collaborative learning experiences help learners do!

Conclusion

Collaborative online learning is both a technology, and a point of view about learning experiences. It is effective for high-stakes learning that requires hitting the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy and immediate on-the-job application. And it's totally doable to add to an existing learning ecosystem.

For more about collaborative learning, please visit blog.intrepidlearning.com or give us a shout at intrepid@vitalsource.com — we'd love to talk anything collaborative learning in the context of your specific goals and opportunities!



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