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How the Workforce *Learns*
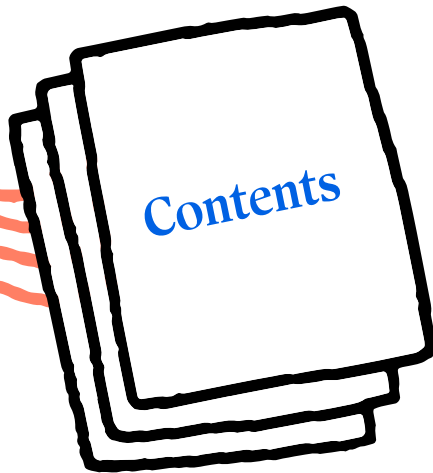
15 Things Your Learning Culture Needs to Get Right

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Contents

Reinventing and revitalizing company culture is one of the biggest priorities for business leaders in today's rapidly evolving climate, in which the requirement to engage and retain talent is fiercer than ever. A learning culture in particular is key to improving the employee experience and moving your business forward, because it can drive skill development, agility, responsiveness, and revenue — all items on the CEO's agenda.

Too many learning and development teams think of learning culture as offering formal training, creating content, and measuring completions. But this dated way of operating is holding companies back from innovation and agility. The world of work is changing quickly, and L&D teams can't be expected to stay on the cutting edge of every discipline.

Learning and business leaders alike have struggled to even define learning culture, let alone build or improve one. So let's start there: A learning culture is defined as "shared behaviors, values, and assumptions."

That's why Degreed asked more than 2,400 workers from 15 countries about their behaviors, values, and assumptions in regard to learning and career growth. We focused our attention on the differences that emerged between those who rated their company learning cultures as positive (called promoters) and those who rated their learning cultures as negative (detractors). We found that companies with positive learning cultures on average perform more skillfully, have more agile teams, adapt more rapidly to change, and grow revenue faster than competitors. But to get there, employees need more than just courses, videos, or even AI-personalized homepages.

Instead of creating more content, L&D teams need to shift focus onto creating the conditions for continuous learning. Specifically, we found that four conditions are present for promoters and largely absent for detractors:

Guidance on what and how to learn

Diverse and active development experiences

Feedback and insights on progress

Opportunities to practice, apply, and stretch skills

In this report, we'll share what these factors mean and offer guidance on how you can prioritize and pinpoint specific actions that can create a more positive learning culture at your own organization.

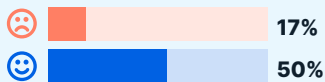15 Things Your Learning Culture Needs to Get Right

Editor's note: the calculations in this report were done with exact values. However, the data visualizations use whole integers, which have been rounded from the raw data.
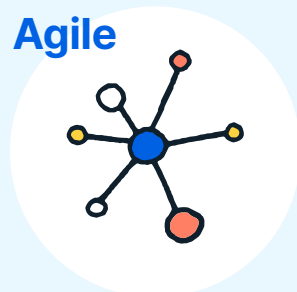
The Business Value of a Positive Learning Culture
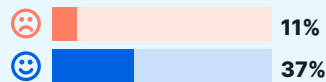
People Perform More Skillfully

Promoters are
**199% more likely
to receive a promotion**

😟 ▆▆▆ **17%**
🙂 ▆▆▆▆▆▆ **50%**

Teams Are More Agile

Promoters are
**235% more likely
to move to new functions
within their companies**

😟 ▆▆ **11%**
🙂 ▆▆▆▆▆ **37%**

Departments Adapt More Rapidly
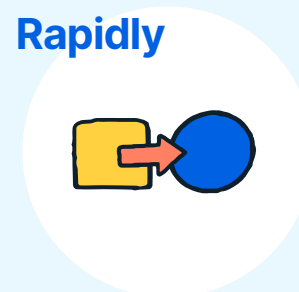
Promoters are
**76% more likely
to say their companies
responded well to
the pandemic**

😟 ▆▆▆▆ **38%**
🙂 ▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ **67%**
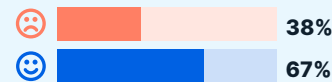
Businesses Grow Faster

Promoters are
**166% more likely
to say their companies
grew revenue faster
than competitors**

😟 ▆▆▆ **21%**
🙂 ▆▆▆▆▆▆ **56%**
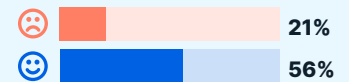
🙂 PROMOTERS   😟 DETRACTORS

Consistent Guidance on What and How to Learn

In positive learning cultures, just-in-time learning isn't enough. Workers need consistent guidance on what to learn for their current roles and future career steps. **This guidance should start with the right motivation and include goal-setting, finding the right resources, and manager support.**

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

In a positive learning culture, promoters are more motivated to learn in order to perform better in their current roles and prepare for future roles.

Conversely, detractors are disproportionately more motivated to learn *only* to complete requirements (or not motivated at all), indicating a lower level of engagement.

ACTION ITEM 1

Tap into these motivations by encouraging workers to focus their development around the specific skills necessary for their current and future roles. Managers should help their teams identify two to three focus skills that overlap between their current roles and their aspirational roles.

We asked:

The last time you learned something useful for your job or career, what was your primary motivation?

☺ PROMOTERS
☹ DETRACTORS

To perform better in my current role

53%

INCREASE

☹ 32%
☺ 49%

To prepare for my next potential role

50%

INCREASE

☹ 18%
☺ 27%

To shift into a new profession or career

-18%

DECREASE

☹ 11%
☺ 9%

To feed my curiosity

-33%

DECREASE

☹ 12%
☺ 8%

To complete requirements

-68%

DECREASE

☹ 22%
☺ 7%

I am not motivated to learn for work

-100%

DECREASE

☹ 5%
☺ 0%
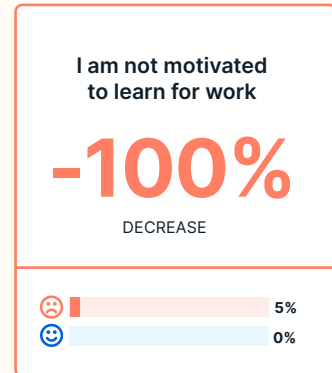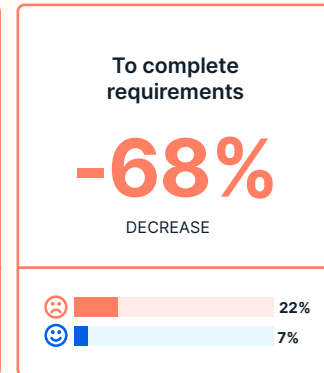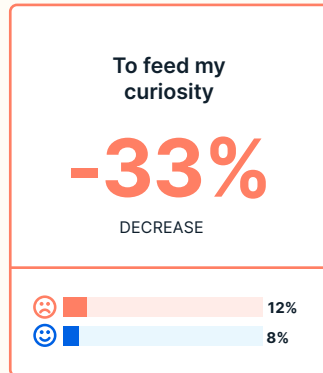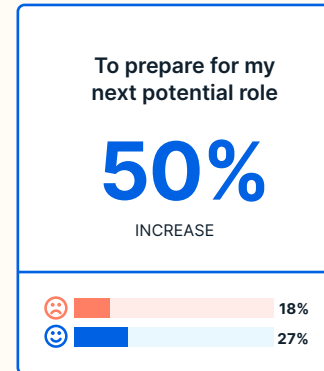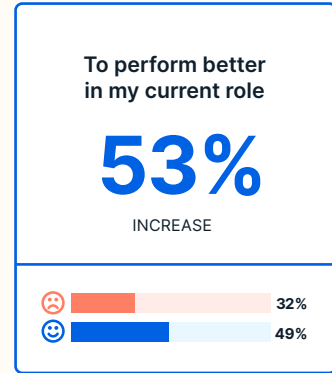
SETTING GOALS

In a positive learning culture, goals matter — particularly when they focus on long-term development opportunities.

Promoters are 52% more likely to plan for their current roles and about 90% more likely to plan for next steps or long-term goals. This shows that positive learning cultures offer a structure for career pathing.

✓

ACTION ITEM 2

Encourage your people to document short-term and long-term goals. It's important that these goals focus on individual tasks and tactical work, which will emphasize skill-based development as opposed to role-based development.

We asked: **Why do you set learning or career goals?**

To get ready for my long-term career aspirations

INCREASE
91%

☹ ■■■■■■ 32%
☺ ■■■■■■■ 62%

To prepare for the next step in my career

INCREASE
89%

☹ ■■■■■■ 31%
☺ ■■■■■■ 59%

To improve performance in my current role

INCREASE
52%

☹ ■■■■■■ 45%
☺ ■■■■■■■ 69%

I do not have specific learning or career goals

DECREASE
-87%

☹ ■■ 23%
☺ ▎ 3%
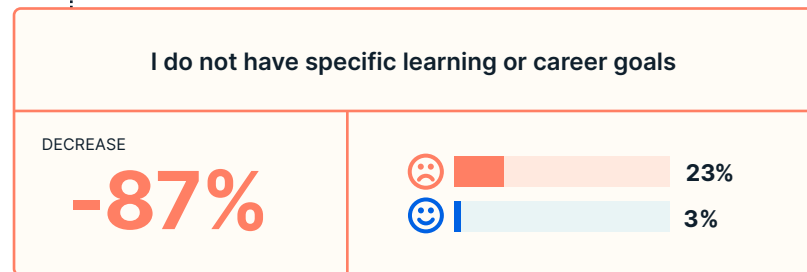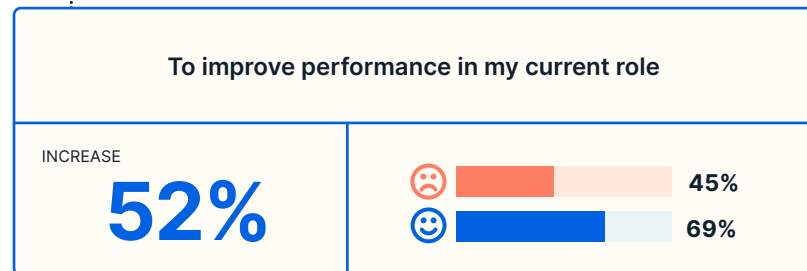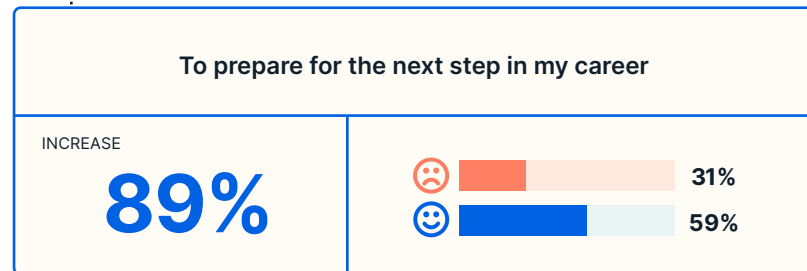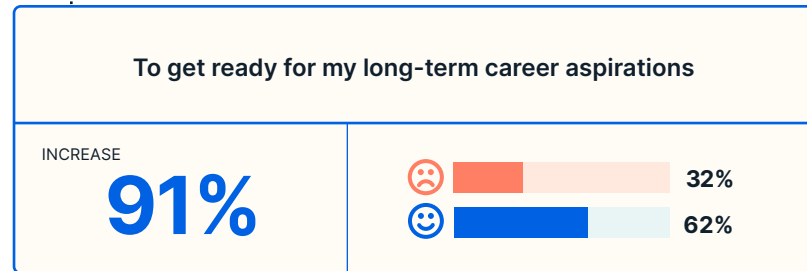
☺ PROMOTERS   ☹ DETRACTORS

In a positive learning culture, people can learn anytime and anywhere.

Our data shows promoters have higher rates of all three types of learning experiences in the 70|20|10 model: experiential, interactive, and instructional. Promoters are also more likely to get diverse perspectives from inside and outside their companies.

We asked:

Which of these resources have you used to find learning relevant to your work or career in the last year?

✓ ACTION ITEM 3

The 70|20|10 model states that 70% of upskilling comes from experiential learning, or learning in the flow of work. Experiential learning opportunities should be digitized, democratized, and accessible to all of your workers to ensure inclusivity. Leverage technology that increases exposure, and use selection frameworks that decrease social biases.

70% | Experiential

My company's messaging apps

| 10% | 35% | | 226% increase |

My company's productivity tools

| 14% | 43% | | 205% increase |

My favorite media web sites or learning apps

| 23% | 47% | | 118% increase |

20% | Interaction

My coach or mentor

| 12% | 24% | | 103% increase |

My social networks and online communities

| 20% | 42% | | 106% increase |

My team manager

| 29% | 34% | | 18% increase |

My teammates, peers, and professional network

| 40% | 45% | | 13% increase |

10% | Instruction

My company's learning or HR systems

| 21% | 47% | | 121% increase |

My company's HR, talent, or learning team

| 18% | 42% | | 140% increase |

☺ PROMOTERS   ☹ DETRACTORS

ACTION ITEM 4

Integrate peer learning into your strategy to increase engagement.

Interaction with peers and external professional networks is crucial for diversity of thought and "outside-in" thinking, which can keep your company competitive.

ACTION ITEM 5

Invest in technology that makes learning meaningful. Don't just measure content completions.

Instead, use your instructional learning systems to demonstrate how workers' development will help them reach their professional goals. That requires user-focused, not admin-focused, technology.

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MANAGER SUPPORT

In a positive learning culture, managers help their people create development plans,

set goals, stretch their skills, and discover new opportunities to grow. In fact, promoters are 270% more likely to say they have a manager that supports their development.

We asked:

How has your manager supported your professional growth in the past year?

🙂 PROMOTERS
🙁 DETRACTORS

270% INCREASE
🙁 13% 🙂 47%
Helped create a development plan or set skill building goals

203% INCREASE
🙁 16% 🙂 48%
Found assignments or projects to practice or stretch my skills while on the job

183% INCREASE
🙁 19% 🙂 52%
Recommended learning resources or development opportunities

123% INCREASE
🙁 19% 🙂 42%
Conducted frequent check-ins on my goals and priorities

119% INCREASE
🙁 23% 🙂 50%
Discussed my career goals or growth opportunities

98% INCREASE
🙁 26% 🙂 52%
Gave feedback or coaching on my strengths and challenges

88% INCREASE
27% 🙁 🙂 50%
Held a formal review of my job or goal performance

-92% DECREASE
🙁 32% 🙂 2%
My manager did not meaningfully support my development during this period

ACTION ITEM 6

Train your managers to create development plans with their teams that focus on more than just formal reviews, promotions, and roles.

These conversations should happen regularly, and plans should be skill-based and actionable. The more diversity in the approach to learning, the better.

Diverse and Active Development Experiences

Learning isn't just about good content. It's about how your people find and consume that content. The way people learn and the opportunities they have to practice new skills matter. According to our data, people need **independent, structured, collaborative, and experiential learning opportunities**.

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In a positive learning culture, independent learning is more continuous.

Promoters on average search the internet to learn weekly, whereas detractors only conduct web searches every month or so.

ACTION ITEM 7

People are already finding the content they need on their own. Focus on creating a centralized and frictionless technical environment in which people know where to go, so they can continue discovering the content they need, aggregate it, organize it, and share it.

We asked: **How often do you do the following when learning on your own?**

	NEVER	LESS THAN EVERY YEAR	EVERY YEAR	EVERY QUARTER	EVERY MONTH	EVERY WEEK	EVERY DAY

Listen to podcasts

Read books

Read online (newsletters, articles, reports)

Search the internet

Use mobile learning apps

Watch videos

Watch webinars or webcasts

DETRACTORS   PROMOTERS
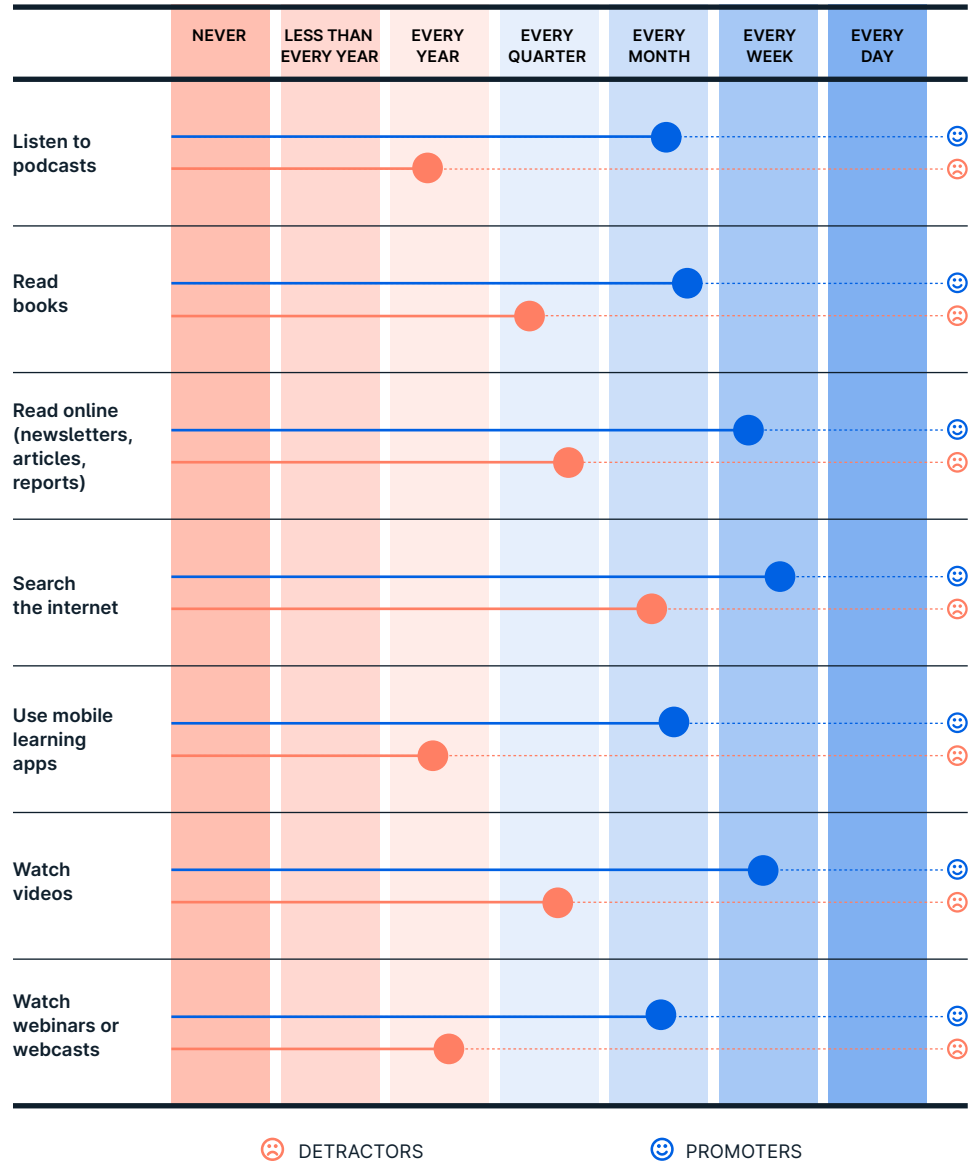
STRUCTURED

In a positive learning culture, structured learning is consistent.

Promoters on average attend a class or workshop nearly every month, while detractors attend structured opportunities less than annually.

✓

ACTION ITEM 8

Offer classes, workshops, or other formal learning opportunities on a regular basis that use a blended learning approach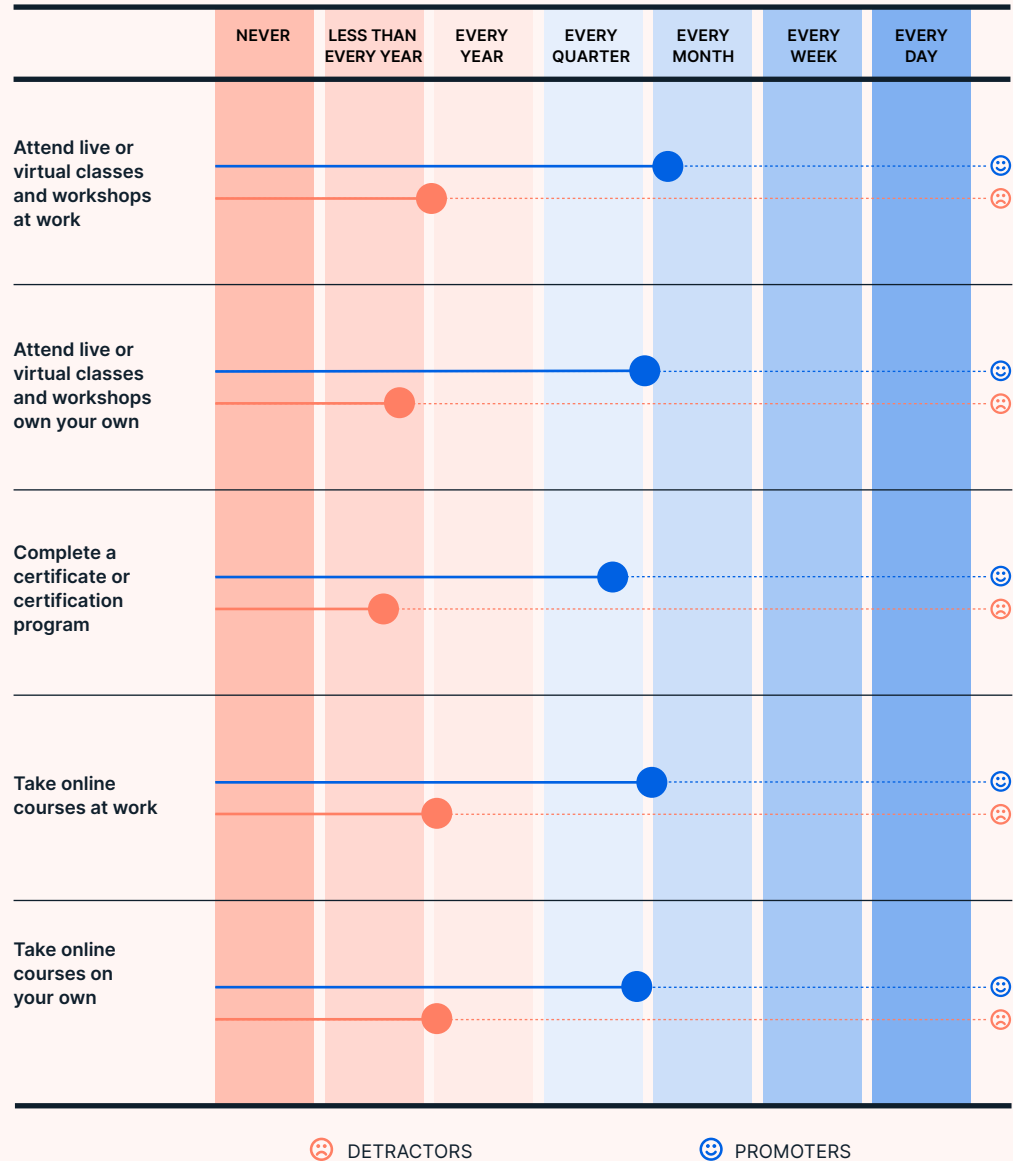. Introduce "flipped classrooms," which allow people to play a more active role in applying their skills and teaching others. This improves knowledge retention.

We asked: **How often do you do the following when learning from instructors?**

	NEVER	LESS THAN EVERY YEAR	EVERY YEAR	EVERY QUARTER	EVERY MONTH	EVERY WEEK	EVERY DAY
Attend live or virtual classes and workshops at work					●			☺
		●						☹
Attend live or virtual classes and workshops own your own				●				☺
		●						☹
Complete a certificate or certification program				●				☺
		●						☹
Take online courses at work				●				☺
		●						☹
Take online courses on your own				●				☺
		●						☹

☹ DETRACTORS   ☺ PROMOTERS

COLLABORATIVE

In a positive learning culture, collaborative learning is encouraged.

Promoters on average get feedback from their teams or colleagues almost weekly, while detractors receive feedback quarterly or less.
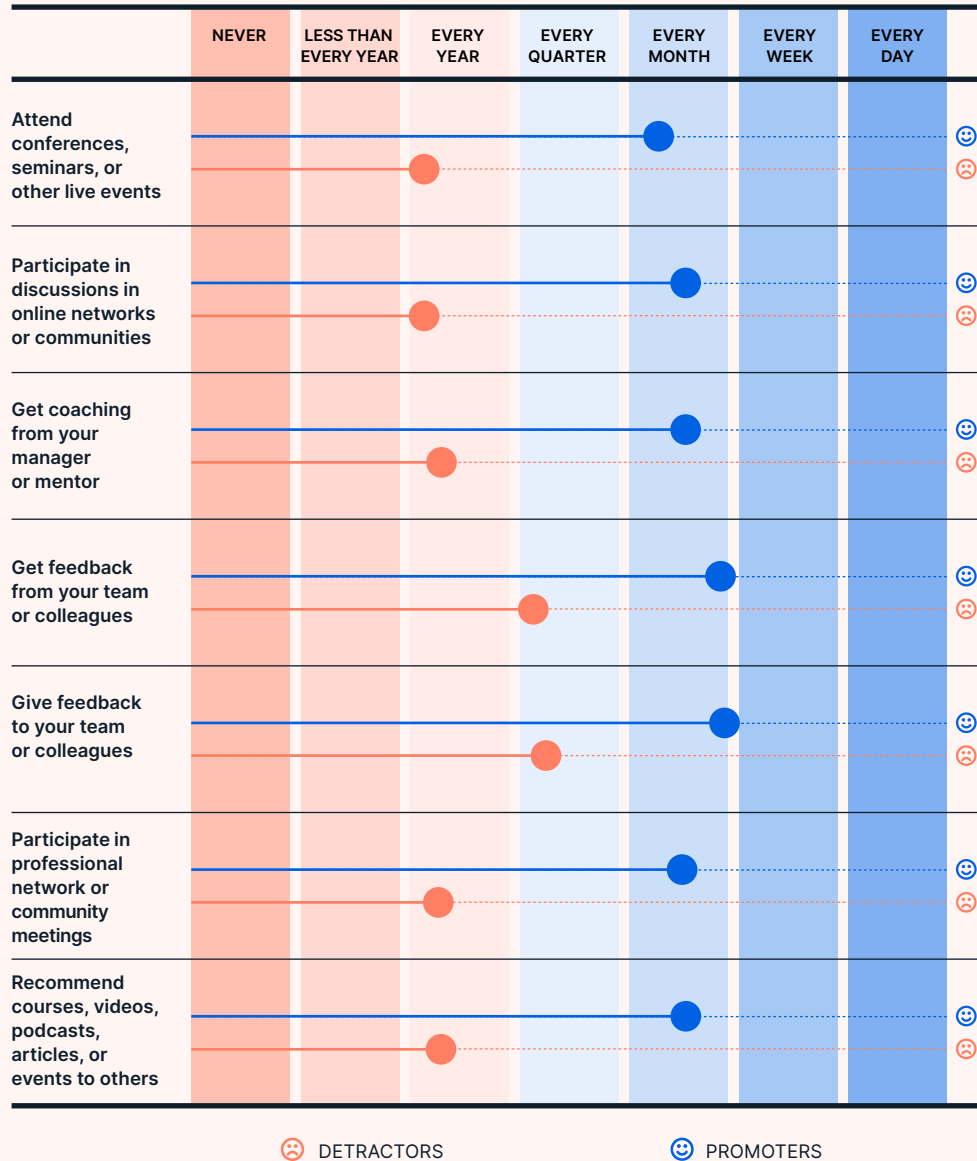

ACTION ITEM 9

Implement tools and processes that encourage people to communicate frequently about the skills they're building. It's important to celebrate the accomplishments of whole teams rather than just individuals. Try hosting quarterly team meetings dedicated to learning a new skill or building a reward system that recognizes individuals who are frequently and efficiently offering feedback to their peers.

We asked: **How often do you do the following when learning with others?**

	NEVER	LESS THAN EVERY YEAR	EVERY YEAR	EVERY QUARTER	EVERY MONTH	EVERY WEEK	EVERY DAY
Attend conferences, seminars, or other live events							
Participate in discussions in online networks or communities							
Get coaching from your manager or mentor							
Get feedback from your team or colleagues							
Give feedback to your team or colleagues							
Participate in professional network or community meetings							
Recommend courses, videos, podcasts, articles, or events to others							

☹ DETRACTORS   ☺ PROMOTERS

EXPERIENTIAL

In a positive learning culture, on-the-job learning is more widespread.

Promoters on average work on experiential learning tasks or projects outside their roles or teams on a near-monthly basis, while detractors participate in similar tasks or projects far less often.
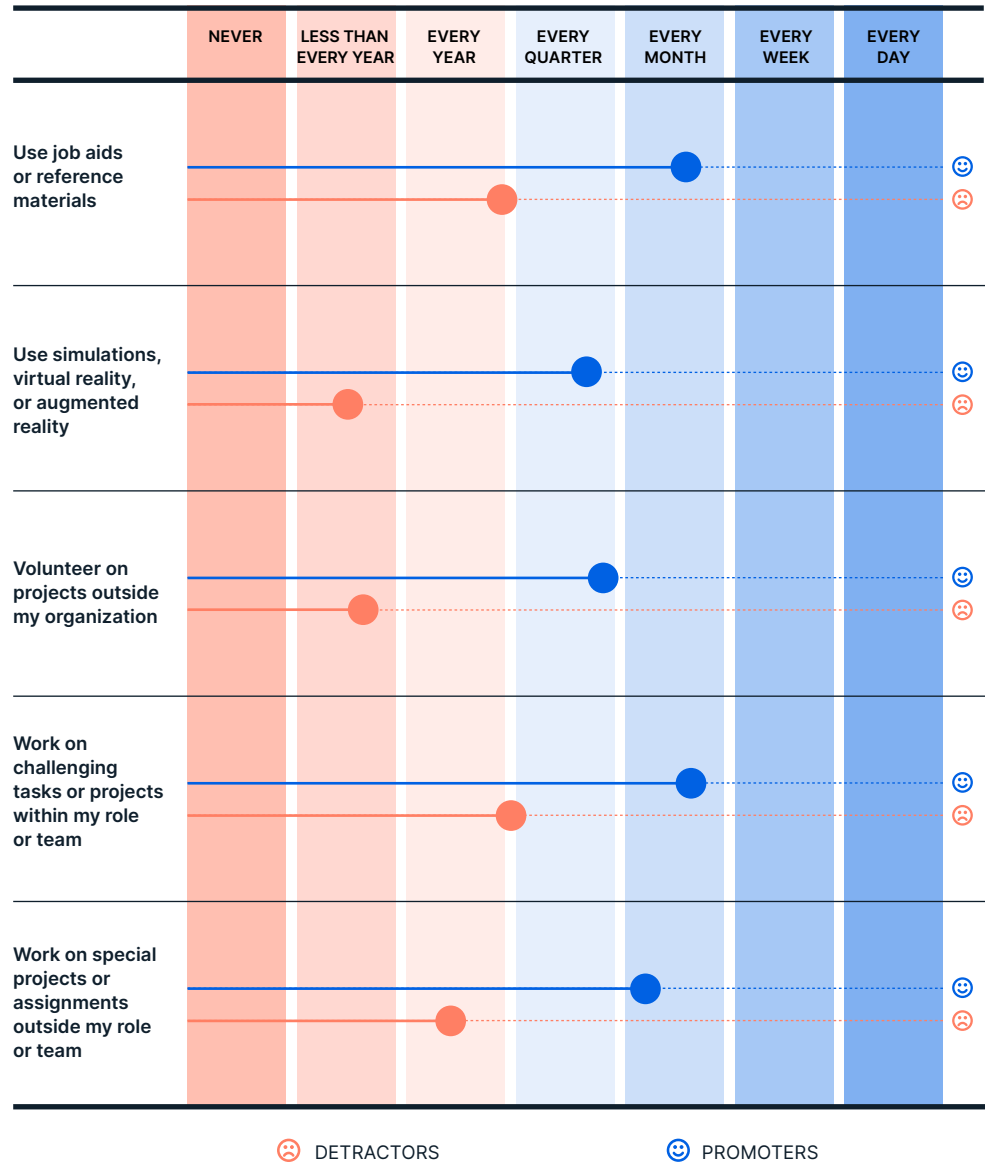
✓ ACTION ITEM 10

Experiential learning starts with manager support and involvement. Team leaders need to understand the importance of creating a culture that shares talent between teams. They need to encourage workers to take on projects outside their respective business units. Give people ongoing opportunities to be challenged at work — particularly outside their typical job responsibilities — to grow new skills and promote collaboration.

We asked: **How often do you do the following when learning by doing?**

	NEVER	LESS THAN EVERY YEAR	EVERY YEAR	EVERY QUARTER	EVERY MONTH	EVERY WEEK	EVERY DAY

Use job aids or reference materials

Use simulations, virtual reality, or augmented reality

Volunteer on projects outside my organization

Work on challenging tasks or projects within my role or team

Work on special projects or assignments outside my role or team

☹ DETRACTORS ☺ PROMOTERS

Feedback and Insights on Progress

Regular feedback and insights reinforce learning and help people continuously progress. Promoters are more likely to be assessed by others and to have updated their own skill profiles in the past year, to document both the skills they have and those they want to learn.
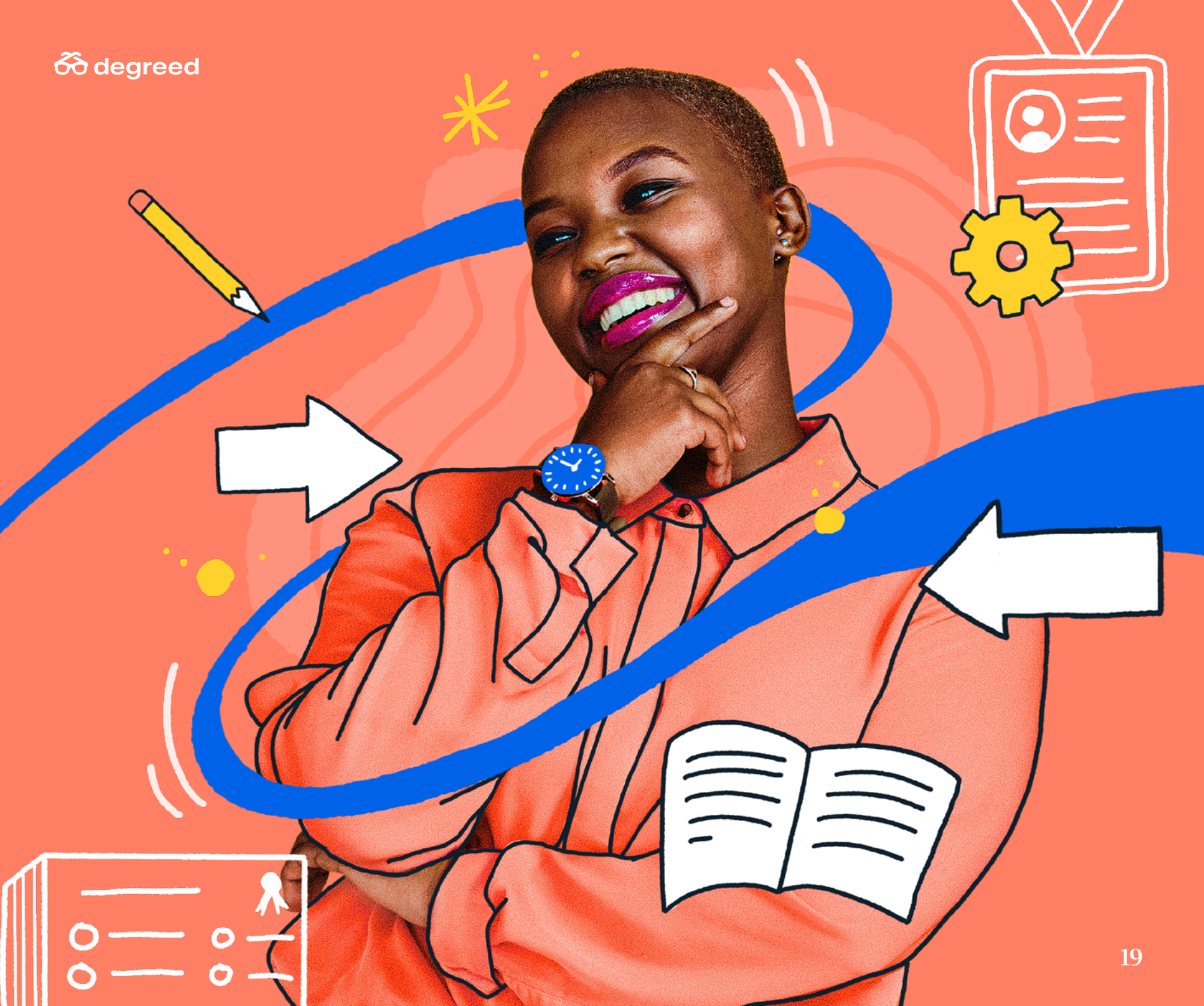
SKILL ASSESSMENTS

In a positive learning culture, skills are rated more often and by more than just HR teams.

Historically, skill assessments have been reserved for top-tier workers, but our data shows workers that receive feedback from peers, managers, and external providers are much more likely to be promoters.

✓

ACTION ITEM 11

Introduce 360 degree skill assessments that invite colleagues and peers to participate in giving feedback. Use tools that offer skill reviews, skill ratings, and informal assessments, so individuals can get the feedback they need, whenever they need it. Inspire and cultivate a culture of psychological safety that values continual, immediate, and informal guidance.

We asked: **Who, if anyone, assessed or rated your skills within the past year?**

My organization's HR team

190%
INCREASE

DETRACTORS: **20%**

PROMOTERS: **58%**

An external provider of education or certifications

172%
INCREASE

DETRACTORS: **18%**

PROMOTERS: **49%**

My team or peers

75%
INCREASE

DETRACTORS: **37%**

PROMOTERS: **65%**

My manager

30%
INCREASE

DETRACTORS: **55%**

PROMOTERS: **71%**

SKILL DATA

In a positive learning culture, employees track and update skill data more frequently.

Note that promoters are almost 200% more likely to update their company job application system to look for internal learning and growth opportunities.

We asked:

Which of the following did you update within the past year to reflect your learning, skills, or work experience?

ACTION ITEM 12

Give employees a reason to update skill profiles more regularly. Make sure they understand how their skill data can benefit them from a social and developmental standpoint. Use things like leaderboards or influencer programs to give people incentives to update their profiles.
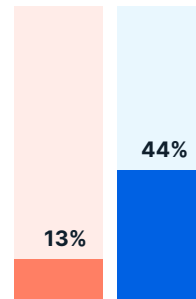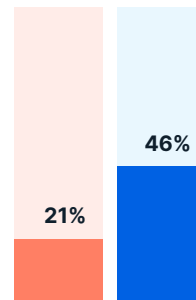
Promoters are
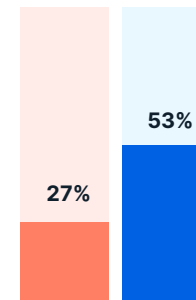**238% more likely to update their online work portfolios.**

13% | 44%
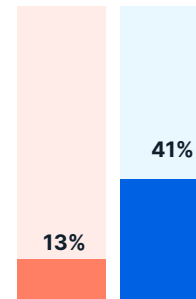
Promoters are
215% more likely to update their talent profiles on a gig work marketplace.

13% | 41%
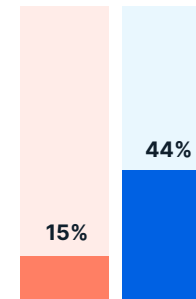
Promoters are
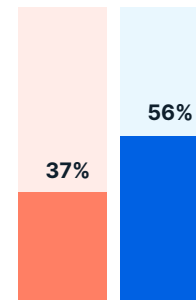**193% more likely to update the profile in their companies' job application system.**

15% | 44%

Promoters are
119% more likely to update the talent profile in their companies' HR systems.

21% | 46%

Promoters are
96% more likely to update their online professional profiles.

27% | 53%

Promoters are
51% more likely to update their resume or CVs.

37% | 56%

☺ PROMOTERS   ☹ DETRACTORS

21

SKILL PROFILES

In a positive learning culture, people are clearly motivated to keep up their skill profiles.

Promoters are more likely to update their profiles to signal their strengths and identify their next learning steps. They're also almost 150% more likely to connect with peers or mentors who have similar skills.

We asked:
What are your main motivations for maintaining and updating digital profiles of your learning, skills, or work experience?

In a positive learning culture, promoters are...

168% more likely to complete their organization's processes.
■ DETRACTORS: **19%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **51%**

147% more likely to connect with peers or mentors who want or have similar skills.
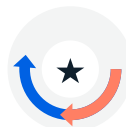■ DETRACTORS: **21%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **51%**

122% more likely to earn recognition or rewards.
■ DETRACTORS: **18%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **40%**

103% more likely to identify their skill gaps so they can work to close them.
■ DETRACTORS: **26%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **52%**

100% more likely to track their activity, habits, and growth.
■ DETRACTORS: **25%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **51%**

44% more likely to demonstrate their strengths so they can be found for new opportunities.
■ DETRACTORS: **40%**   ■ PROMOTERS: **57%**

Without a positive learning culture, people are 86% less likely to say they regularly update their digital profiles.

ACTION ITEM 13

Ensure your talent strategy offers and values internal growth opportunities based on skill data and profiles.
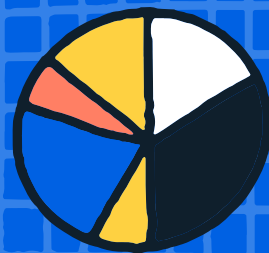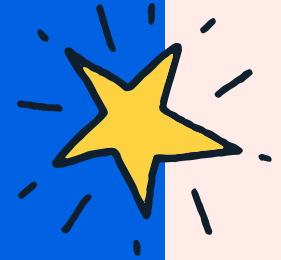
Use solutions that can integrate with your entire learning and HR ecosystem so skill data isn't stored in silos but can aggregate for a holistic picture of individual and organizational capabilities.

Opportunities to Practice, Apply, and Stretch Skills

When people have a chance to learn on the job, they collaborate and learn from those around them. That engagement creates business value that can help advance your entire organization. People are getting more work done and gaining new expertise without forgoing their day-to-day responsibilities.

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COLLABORATIVE

In a positive learning culture, workers can see career possibilities and find pathways to growth.

Our data shows that promoters have control over their own career development, access to easy-to-use career planning tools, and experiential learning opportunities to develop consistently on the job.
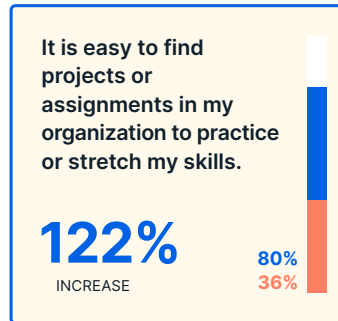
We asked:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your career?

✓ **ACTION ITEM 14**

Provide access and visibility into experiential learning opportunities. This could look like an internal network or opportunity marketplace that matches skills to new experiences in which employees can practice and reinforce their development. This visibility also helps mitigate proximity and other biases by being more inclusive and discoverable for all employees, not just referrals.

My organization provides easy-to-use tools to take control of my career planning.

196%
INCREASE

81%
27%

It is easy to find new jobs or roles in my organization to advance my career.

149%
INCREASE

73%
30%

It is easy to find people in my organization to help develop the skills or connections I need.

146%
INCREASE

80%
33%

My organization is transparent about communicating growth opportunities.

134%
INCREASE

85%
36%

It is easy to find projects or assignments in my organization to practice or stretch my skills.

122%
INCREASE

80%
36%

My organization makes good use of my skills.

99%
INCREASE

83%
42%

I know where else my skills could be useful within my organization.

42%
INCREASE

87%
61%

☺ PROMOTERS
☹ DETRACTORS

STRETCH

In a positive learning culture, people grow in all directions, not just by climbing a vertical career ladder.

The largest differentiator between promoters and detractors is the ability to work with new teams or functions. Promoters are also more likely to work with a mentor or coach or on a temporary assignment with another team.
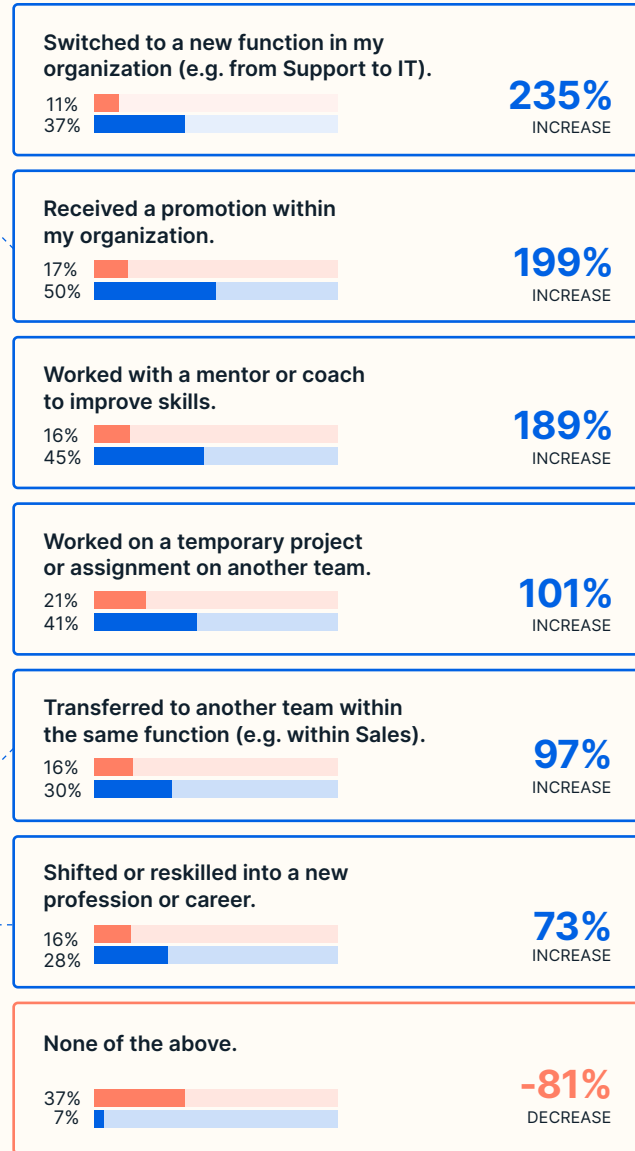
We asked:

Which of the following types of career growth have you experienced at work in the last three years?

ACTION ITEM 15

Your people own their careers now, and that changes everything. Promotions matter, but they're not the only kind of mobility. What employees need from their managers and your learning team is the support and resources to grow. That could look like a mentorship or working on a temporary project on another team.

Switched to a new function in my organization (e.g. from Support to IT).
11%
37%
235% INCREASE

Received a promotion within my organization.
17%
50%
199% INCREASE

Worked with a mentor or coach to improve skills.
16%
45%
189% INCREASE

Worked on a temporary project or assignment on another team.
21%
41%
101% INCREASE

Transferred to another team within the same function (e.g. within Sales).
16%
30%
97% INCREASE

Shifted or reskilled into a new profession or career.
16%
28%
73% INCREASE

None of the above.
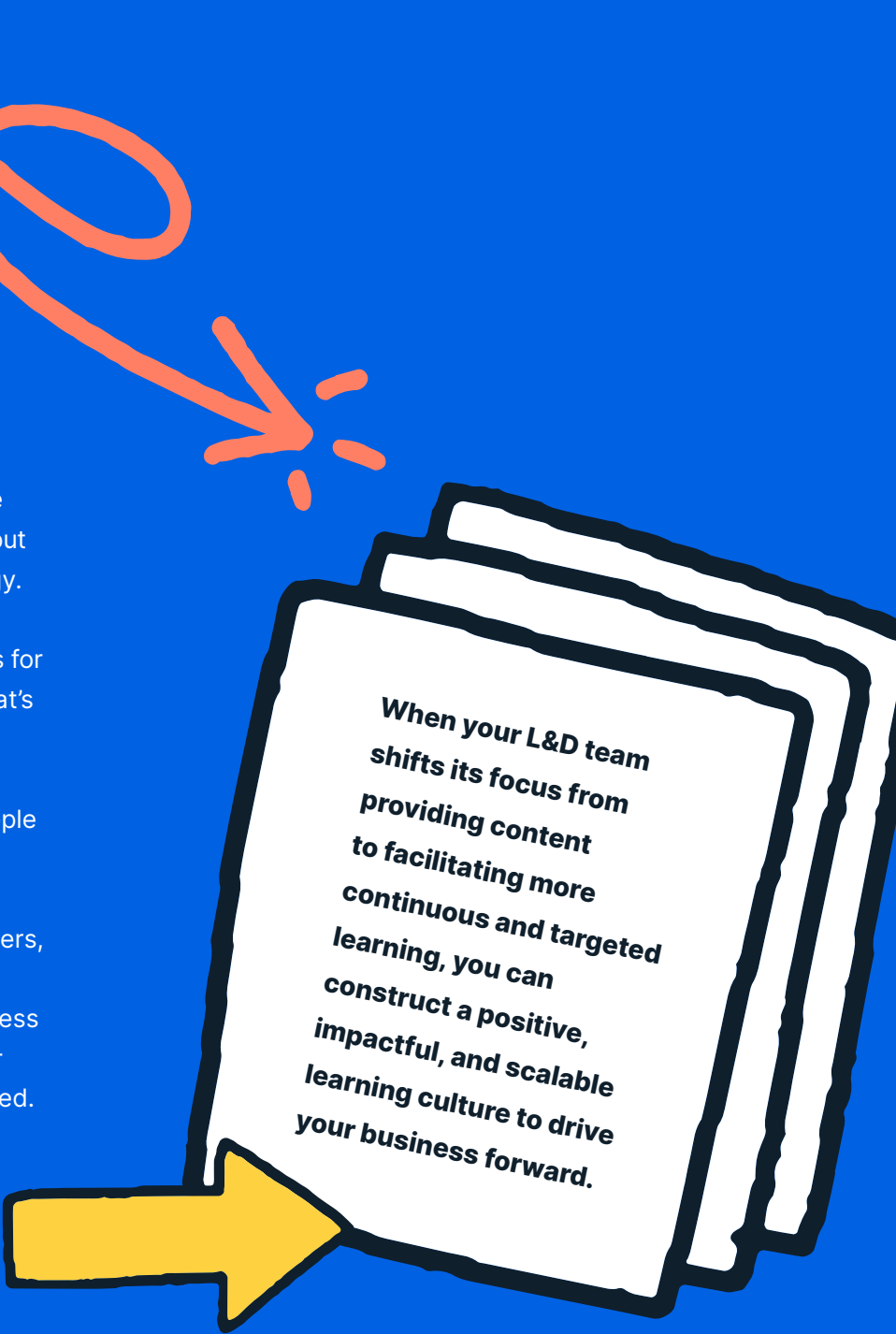37%
7%
-81% DECREASE

☺ PROMOTERS   ☹ DETRACTORS

"Rather than being regarded as one of the most forward-thinking functions in an organization, leading it through a learning transformation, many feel that their L&D functions struggle to keep up with the needs of their business."

McKinsey & Company

Constructing a positive learning culture based on four foundational elements — **guidance, diverse experiences, feedback, and active development opportunities** — is the key to not only keeping up with the needs of your business but staying ahead with a skill-based, agile development strategy.

Just because a company has policies, systems, or processes for learning doesn't mean it has a positive learning culture. What's more important is how people behave and what they value.

This research will help you better understand how your people grow and what they need from learning teams to be more successful. We know 15 action items is a lot. It's why the Degreed team, including multiple former chief learning officers, recommends a phased approach to implementing anything new. Begin by making sure you understand the larger business goals, then meet with your key stakeholders as well as your people managers to identify which items should be prioritized.
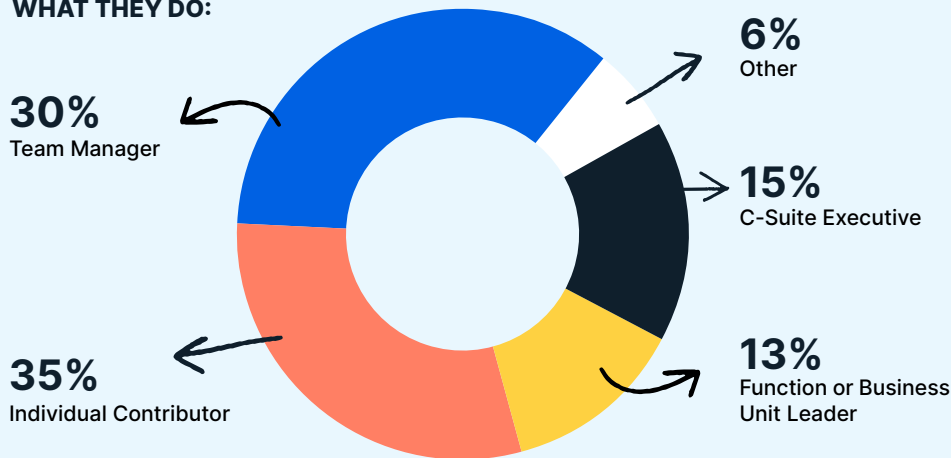
When your L&D team shifts its focus from providing content to facilitating more continuous and targeted learning, you can construct a positive, impactful, and scalable learning culture to drive your business forward.
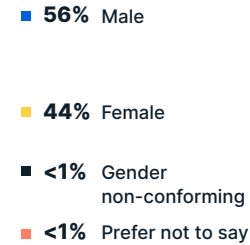
Demographics and Methodology

This research was undertaken throughout July and August 2021 by Hanover Research. Hanover engaged 2,472 workers in a 10-minute survey to understand the differences between positive and negative learning cultures.
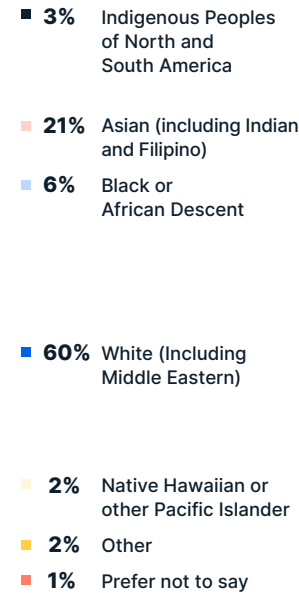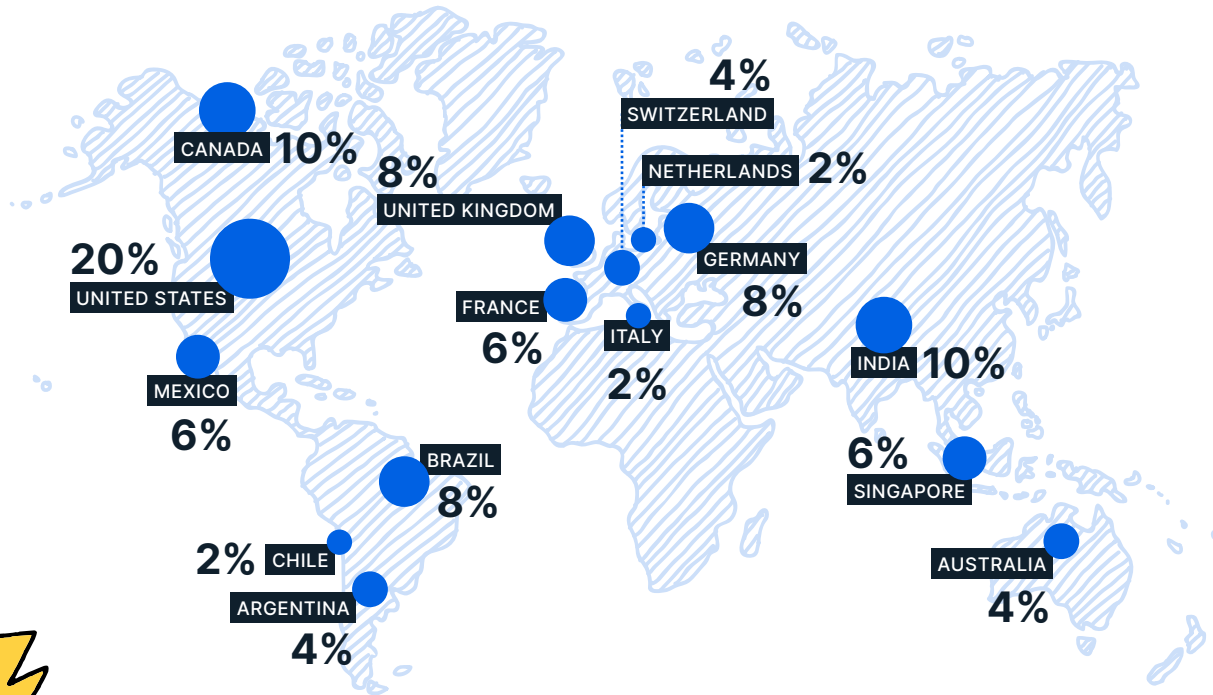
The Workers

WHAT THEY DO:

6% Other

15% C-Suite Executive

13% Function or Business Unit Leader

30% Team Manager

35% Individual Contributor

GENDER:

- **56%** Male
- **44%** Female
- **<1%** Gender non-conforming
- **<1%** Prefer not to say

RACE:

- **3%** Indigenous Peoples of North and South America
- **21%** Asian (including Indian and Filipino)
- **6%** Black or African Descent
- **60%** White (Including Middle Eastern)
- **2%** Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- **2%** Other
- **1%** Prefer not to say

Where They Live

CANADA **10%**

8%
UNITED KINGDOM

4%
SWITZERLAND

NETHERLANDS **2%**

20%
UNITED STATES

GERMANY
8%

FRANCE
6%

ITALY
2%

INDIA **10%**

MEXICO
6%

BRAZIL
8%

6%
SINGAPORE

2% CHILE

ARGENTINA
4%

AUSTRALIA
4%

COMPANY SIZE:

	10%	41%	23%	9%	18%
Employees	500-999	1,000-4,999	5,000-19,999	20,000-49,999	50,000+

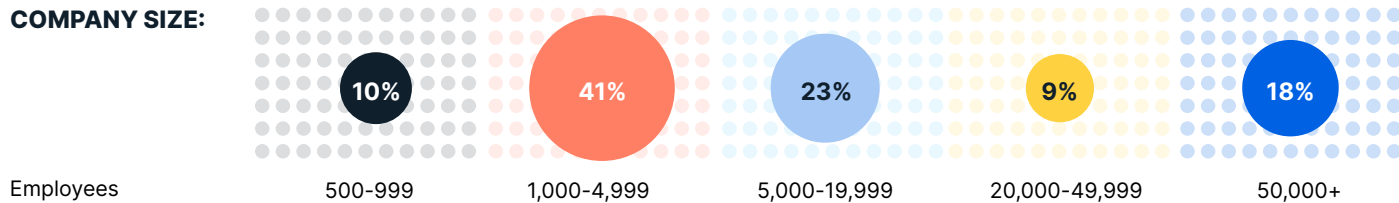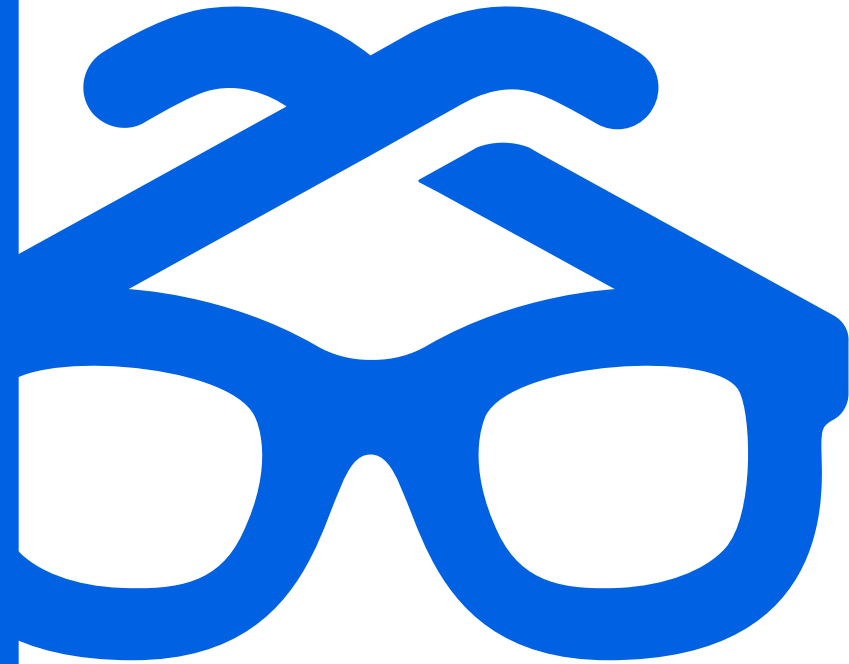## About Degreed

Degreed is the workforce upskilling platform used by one in three Fortune 50 companies. We connect all your learning, talent development, and internal mobility opportunities to intelligence on the skills your business needs next. And we do it all in one simple, fluid, skill-building experience that's powered by your people's expertise and interests. So you can transform your workforce from within. Founded in 2012, Degreed is headquartered in Pleasanton, California, with additional offices in Salt Lake City, New York, London, Amsterdam, and Brisbane.

Learn more about Degreed:

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