2025

State of the L&D Industry Report

Your inside look at the real salaries, skills, and trends shaping L&D careers in 2025—based on insights from 600+ learning professionals.








THE ELEARNING DESIGNER'S ACADEMY

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Methodology 2
Demographics 6

Chapter One: Salaries 17
Chapter Two: Portfolios 30
Chapter Three: Hiring 47
Chapter Four: Modalities & Tools 57
Chapter Five: Artificial Intelligence 65

Conclusion 74



Introduction

Inside The eLearning Designer's Academy, we have a front-row seat to how instructional designers, eLearning developers, and other L&D professionals are navigating their careers—what they're earning, how they're building their skills, and what it really takes to land (and keep) a role in this industry.

But most don't have access to that kind of behind-the-scenes insight and data. So, in early 2025, we surveyed over 600 L&D professionals across the U.S. to uncover what's really happening in the field—from salaries and portfolios to hiring trends, tools, and the rise of AI.

Our goal? To give you a clear, realistic snapshot of the industry today—grounded in data, not guesswork—so you can make smarter decisions about your career or your team.

Long story short, we...

1

Surveyed over 600 full-time L&D professionals.

To better understand who they are, what they do, how they work, and what challenges they're facing in today's job market.

2

Focused on what really matters in this field.

From salaries and career paths to portfolios, hiring practices, tools, and the impact of AI—we went deep on the things that actually shape L&D careers.

3

Uncovered insights you can use.

This report is built to help you make smarter career moves, better hiring decisions, and stronger cases for the value of learning and development.

Methodology



In early 2025, we set out to get a clear, real-world picture of the L&D landscape—straight from the people working in it every day. We surveyed 620 instructional designers, eLearning developers, training managers, and L&D leaders across the U.S., asking about salaries, hiring, portfolios, tools, and AI use.

Our goal wasn't to create an abstract academic study. Instead, we wanted insights that would actually help you make smarter decisions about your career or your team. That's why we focused on full-time professionals in the U.S. (responses from outside the U.S. and from freelancers were too few to draw meaningful conclusions—so we'll save those for a future, expanded version).

We reached people through The eLearning Designer's Academy community, our social channels, and our email list. Participation was voluntary, and because this wasn't a random sample, the results reflect the voices of those who chose to share their experiences—not necessarily every L&D professional out there.

The survey mixed multiple-choice, rating scale, and open-ended questions so we could capture both the hard numbers and the stories behind them. We also kept it anonymous to encourage honest, unfiltered responses. After collecting the data, we cleaned it up, focused on our target audience, and analyzed the results to spot trends, patterns, and themes worth talking about.

How to Use this Report

This report was created to give you actionable, data-backed insights into the state of the L&D industry in 2025. Whether you're growing your career or leading a learning team, here's how to make the most of it:



For L&D Professionals

Use this report to benchmark your salary, experience, and role against others in the field. It's also a great way to understand how portfolios are being used in hiring—and what actually makes one stand out.



For Hiring Managers

If you're hiring or managing an L&D team, use this data to check if your salaries are competitive, your hiring practices are aligned with industry trends, and your team structure reflects where the field is headed.



For Career Planners

If you're mapping your next move, this report offers a snapshot of where the industry is going—from tools and team setups to how AI is shaping the work—so you can make informed, future-focused decisions.

About the Authors

Tim Slade

Creator of The eLearning Designer's Academy

Tim Slade is a speaker, author, and award-winning freelance eLearning designer with over 15 years of experience helping individuals and organizations elevate their instructional design and eLearning content. He has worked with globally recognized brands including Tiffany & Co., GoDaddy, Penske, Les Schwab, Capital One, Estée Lauder, and many others.

Throughout his career, Tim has been honored with multiple awards for creative, engaging, and results-driven learning solutions. He is a regular speaker at international instructional design and eLearning conferences, a recognized Articulate Super Hero, and a LinkedIn Learning instructor. Tim is also the author of *The eLearning Designer's Handbook* and the founder of The eLearning Designer's Academy—the #1 community and learning platform for new instructional designers and eLearning developers. His work has helped thousands of professionals gain the skills, confidence, and support needed to grow successful careers in learning and development.



About the Authors

Sue Yeates

Strategic Insights Consultant

With over 20 years of experience, Sue Yeates has dedicated her career to helping organizations use data to make smarter decisions, operate more efficiently, and turn insights into meaningful business outcomes.

Throughout her career working with organizations big and small—including Fortune 500 companies—Sue has led enterprise-wide initiatives that improve forecasting, uncover root causes of inefficiencies, and enhance the customer experience. Her work consistently bridges the gap between data and decision-making, empowering leaders to take strategic action with clarity and confidence.

Known for transforming complex information into clear, compelling insights, Sue combines deep operational knowledge with a forward-thinking mindset. She brings a unique ability to connect data, systems, and people—making her a valued partner to leaders navigating growth, change, and innovation.



Demographics

The Professionals Behind the Data

A snapshot of the learning professionals, roles, and organizations represented in our findings.

Summary

Who took our survey matters just as much as the data itself.

This year's participants represent a diverse, highly educated group of L&D professionals spanning a wide range of industries, organization sizes, and experience levels. Most work remotely or in hybrid settings, with the majority serving as individual contributors focused on instructional design.

The group reflects the broad scope of responsibilities within the field—mixing generalists who manage the full design process with specialists who focus on specific stages. Organizational structures are almost evenly split between centralized and decentralized models, highlighting the varied ways companies approach L&D. Taken together, these demographics offer important context for understanding the trends and insights throughout this report.



Insights from

600+

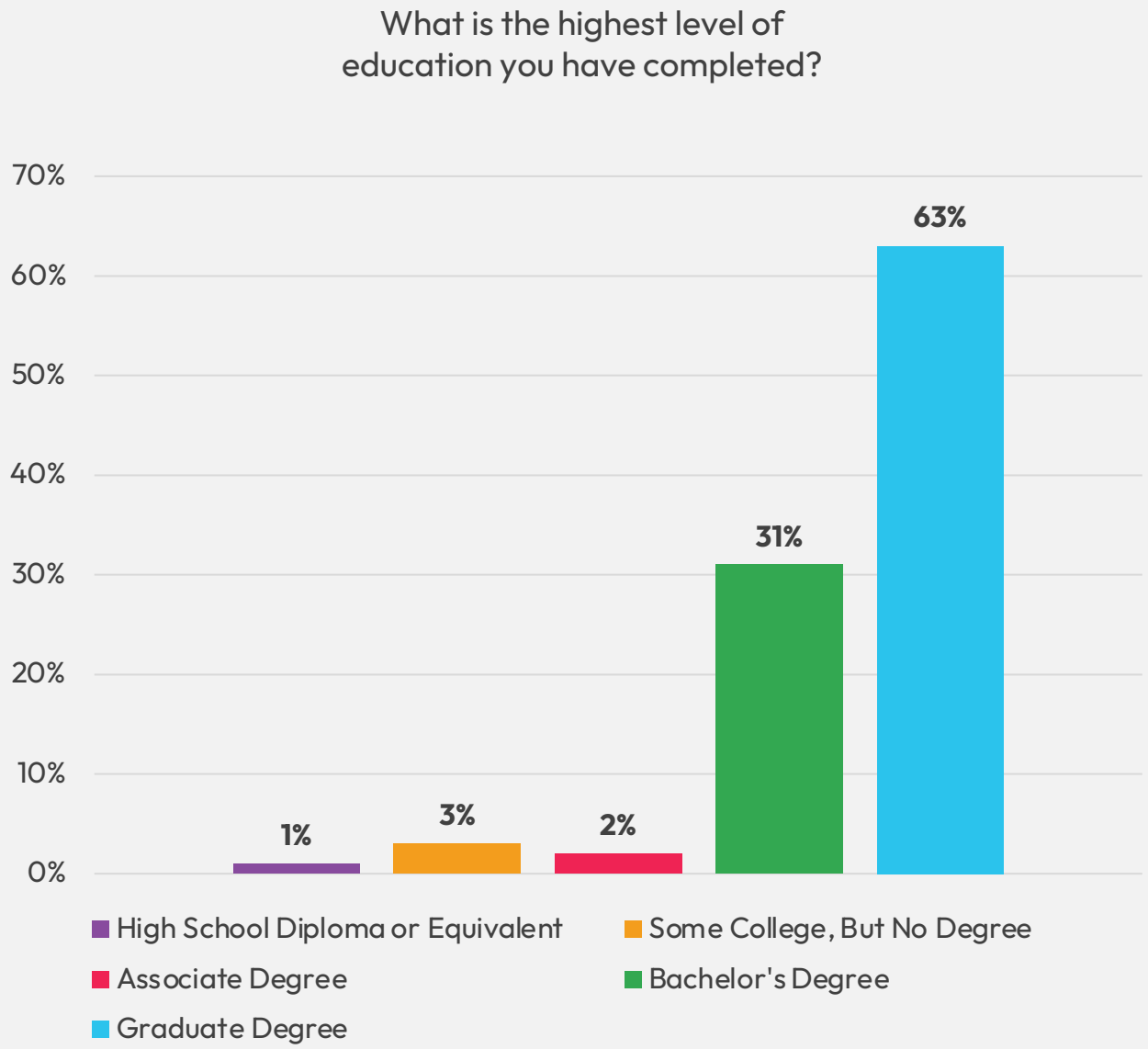
Learning & Development Practitioners & Leaders

Education

Nearly all survey participants (94%) hold at least a bachelor's degree, with a significant majority (63%) having earned a graduate degree. This reflects a highly educated respondent pool—one that mirrors the broader learning and development field, where advanced education is often viewed as a key asset.

In L&D, degrees in education, instructional design, organizational development, and related fields are frequently valued for roles that require deep expertise in designing learning experiences, leading teams, and shaping strategic initiatives.

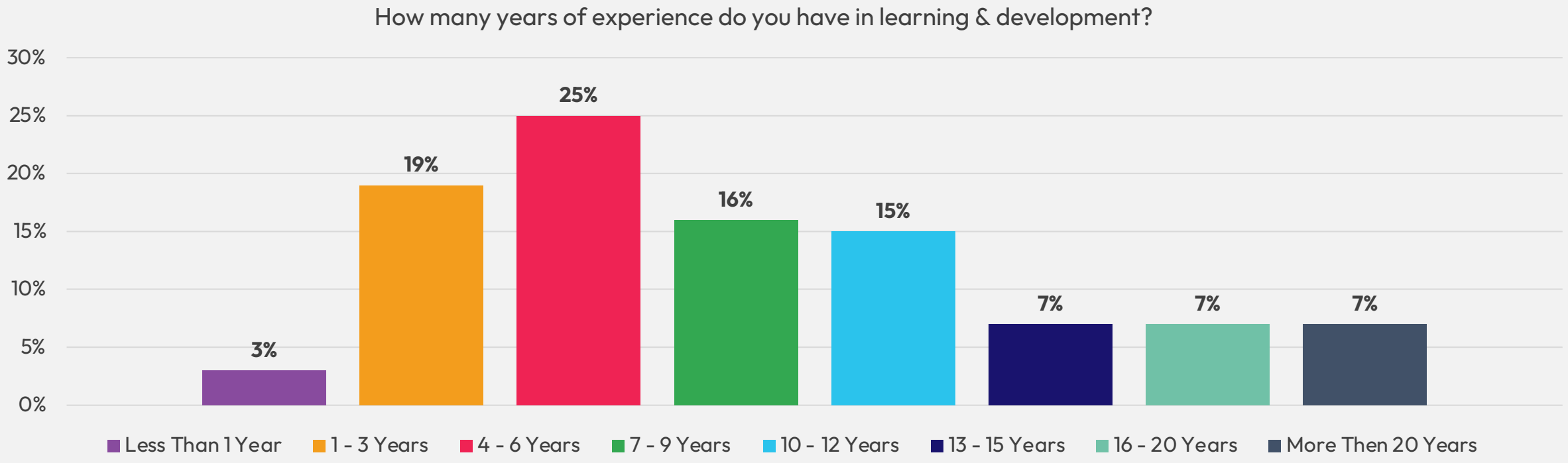
While not the sole measure of capability, this high level of formal education underscores the professional commitment of those working in the field and provides important context for interpreting the findings in this report.



Experience

Most participants (63%) have fewer than 10 years of experience in learning and development, with 4–6 years being the most common (25%). Only 3% are brand new to the field, meaning the majority of respondents bring at least some professional tenure to their roles. This positions the group as primarily early- to mid-career professionals, balancing fresh perspectives with meaningful, hands-on experience.

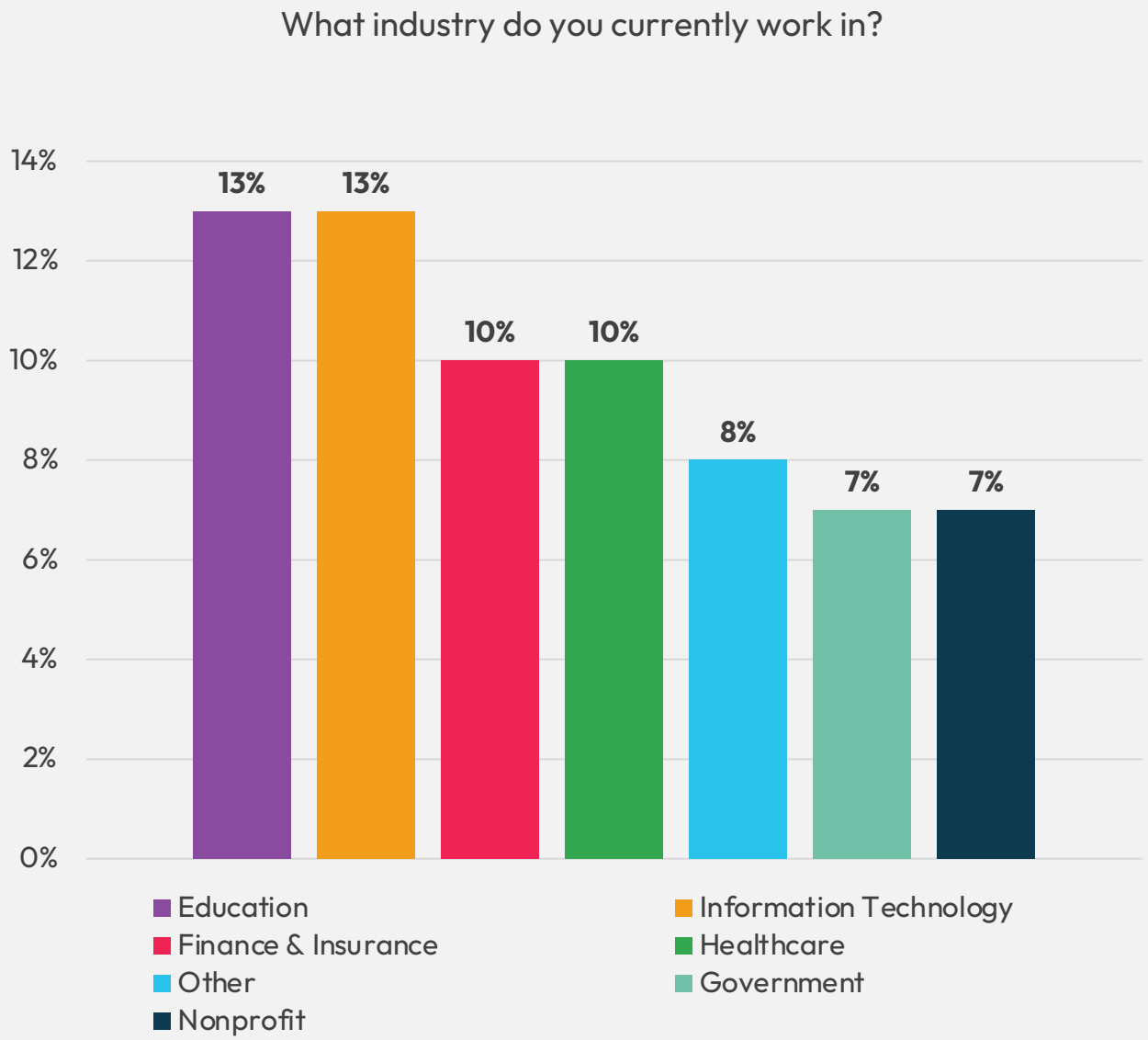
These respondents are experienced enough to share practical, real-world insights yet still in a stage of career growth where they are exploring new tools, approaches, and opportunities. Their adaptability and willingness to evolve offers valuable context for understanding the trends, challenges, and opportunities reflected in this year's findings.



Industry

Participants represent more than 18 different industries, though the chart includes only those with at least 5% representation. Education and Information Technology lead the way (each at 13%), followed by Finance, Healthcare, and Government. This distribution highlights the breadth of the L&D field, which serves professionals in organizations of all shapes and sizes.

This cross-sector presence underscores the growing importance of workplace learning — not only in education and tech, but also across finance, healthcare, public service, and beyond. L&D has become a critical function that drives growth, performance, and adaptability in virtually every corner of the modern economy.



Size of Organization

A slight majority of participants (56%) work in large organizations with more than 1,000 employees, including over a quarter (26%) at enterprise-level companies of 10,000+ employees. The remaining 44% represent small to mid-sized organizations.

This balance provides a well-rounded perspective on L&D practices, reflecting experiences from both the scale and resources of large enterprises and the agility and versatility often found in smaller organizations. Together, these viewpoints offer a comprehensive snapshot of workplace learning across varied business environments.

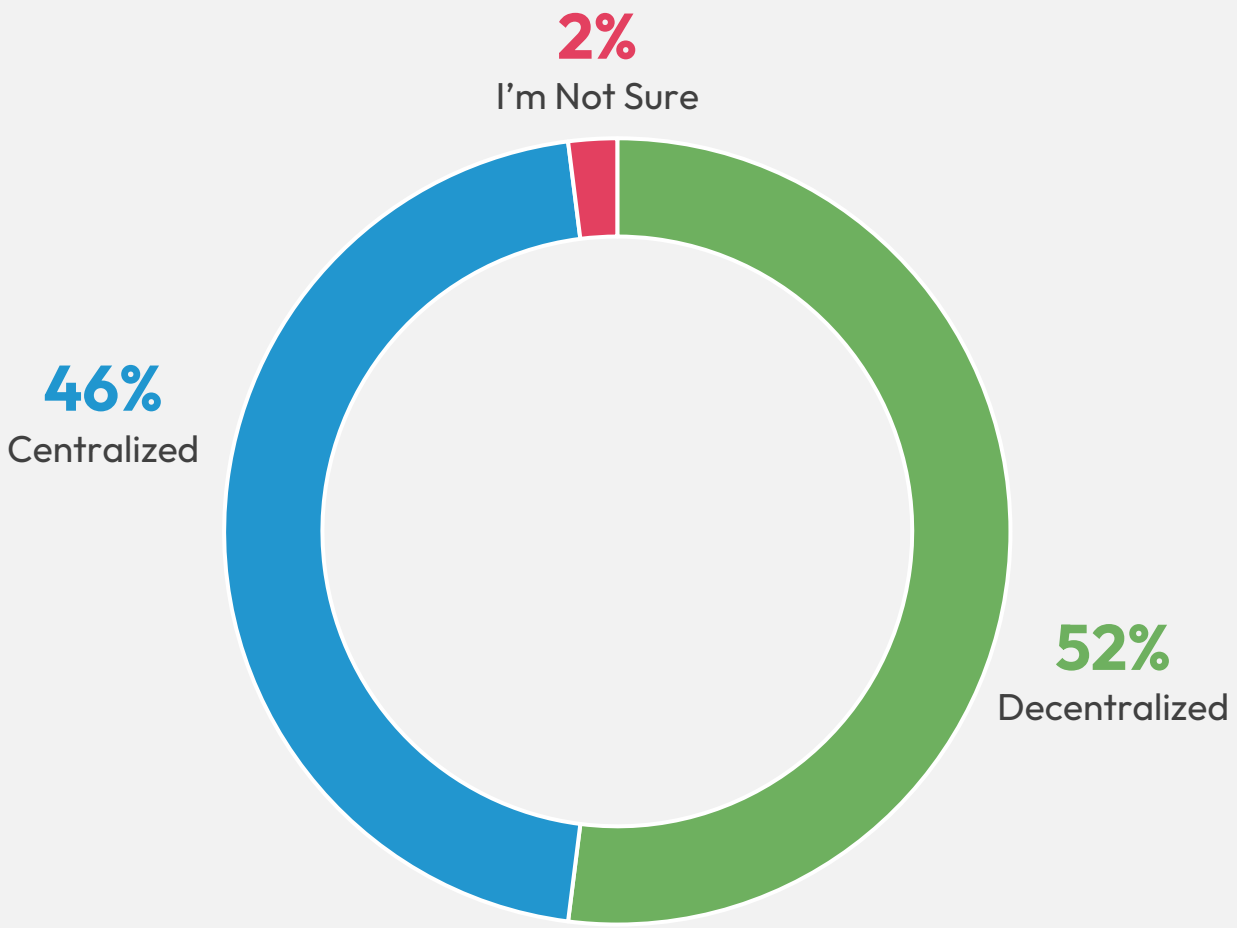


L&D Team Structure

Participants are almost evenly divided between decentralized (52%) and centralized (46%) L&D structures, with only a small percentage unsure of their setup. This near 50/50 split underscores the fact that there is no single “right” way to organize learning functions—organizations choose the structure that best aligns with their culture, goals, and resources.

Centralized models tend to focus on standardizing learning initiatives across the business, ensuring consistent quality and maximizing efficiency at scale. In contrast, decentralized structures allow for more flexibility, enabling teams or regions to tailor learning programs to their unique needs and priorities. This diversity in approach highlights the adaptability of L&D as a function and reflects how organizations balance consistency with agility in meeting the learning needs of their workforce.

Is the learning & development (L&D) function within your organization currently centralized or decentralized?

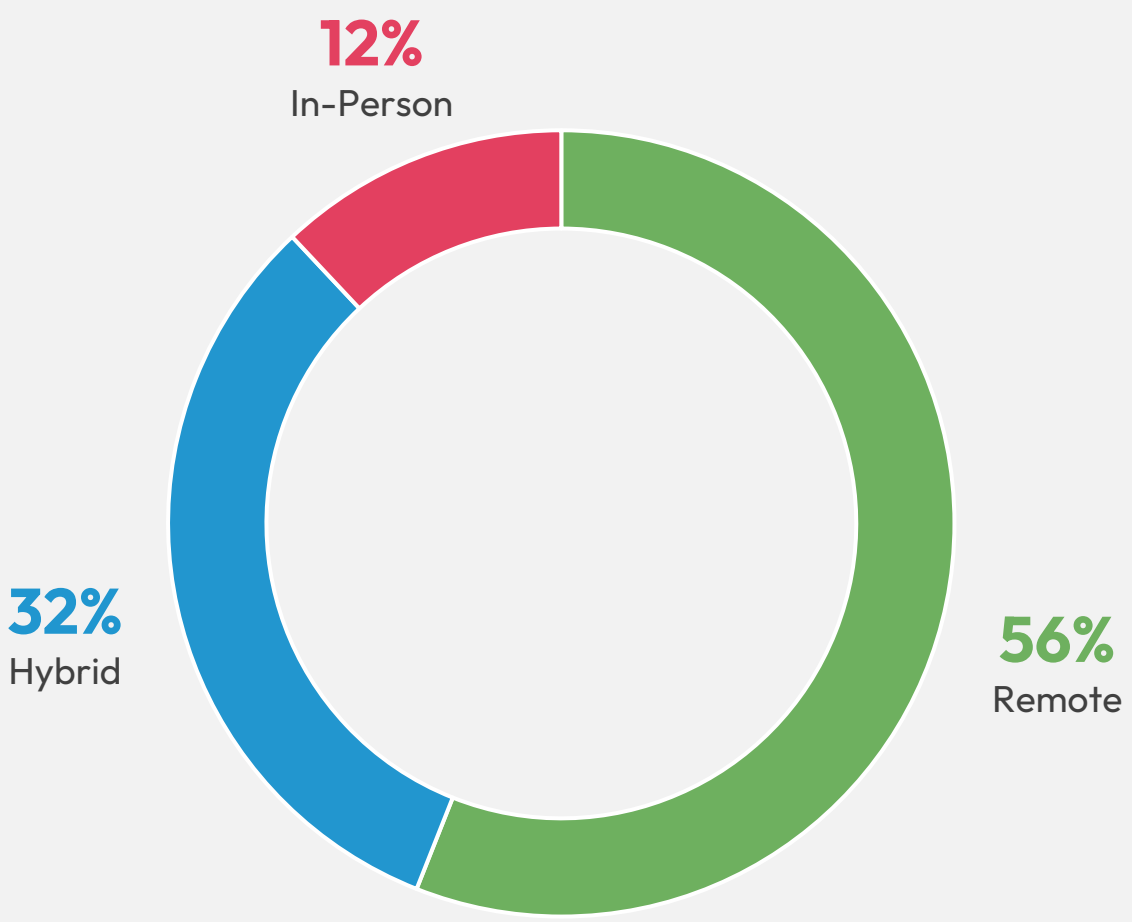


Work Arrangement

A majority of participants (56%) work full remotely, while another 32% follow a hybrid schedule that blends remote and in-person work. Only 12% report working entirely on-site. This means that nearly nine in ten L&D professionals have at least some flexibility in where they work.

This shift toward remote and hybrid arrangements reflects the digital-first nature of L&D, where much of the work—from course design to virtual facilitation—can be done from anywhere. It also mirrors broader workplace trends that have evolved over the past several years, with organizations adapting to employee expectations for flexibility, work-life balance, and access to a wider talent pool beyond geographic boundaries.

What is your current primary work arrangement?

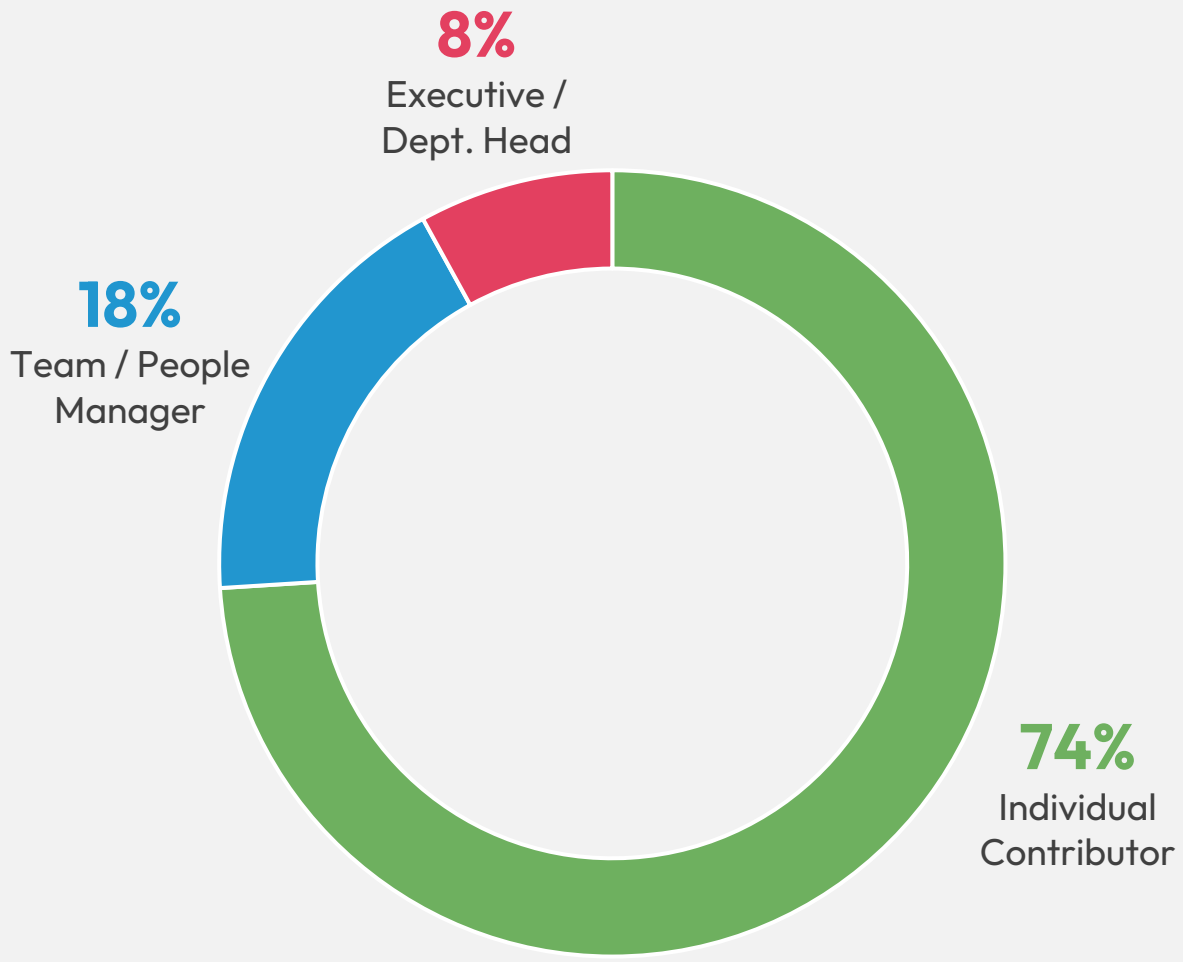


Job Level

Nearly three-quarters of participants (74%) identify as individual contributors, while 18% serve as team or people managers, and just 8% hold executive or department head roles. This means the survey results overwhelmingly reflect the perspectives of professionals who are directly responsible for creating, developing, and delivering learning solutions day-to-day.

By capturing the voices of those doing the hands-on work—rather than only those leading teams or setting strategy—this data offers an authentic, ground-level view of trends, challenges, and realities in the L&D space. It provides valuable insight into the skills being applied, the tools being used, and the evolving nature of the work itself.

Based on your primary source of income, how would you define your role within your organization?

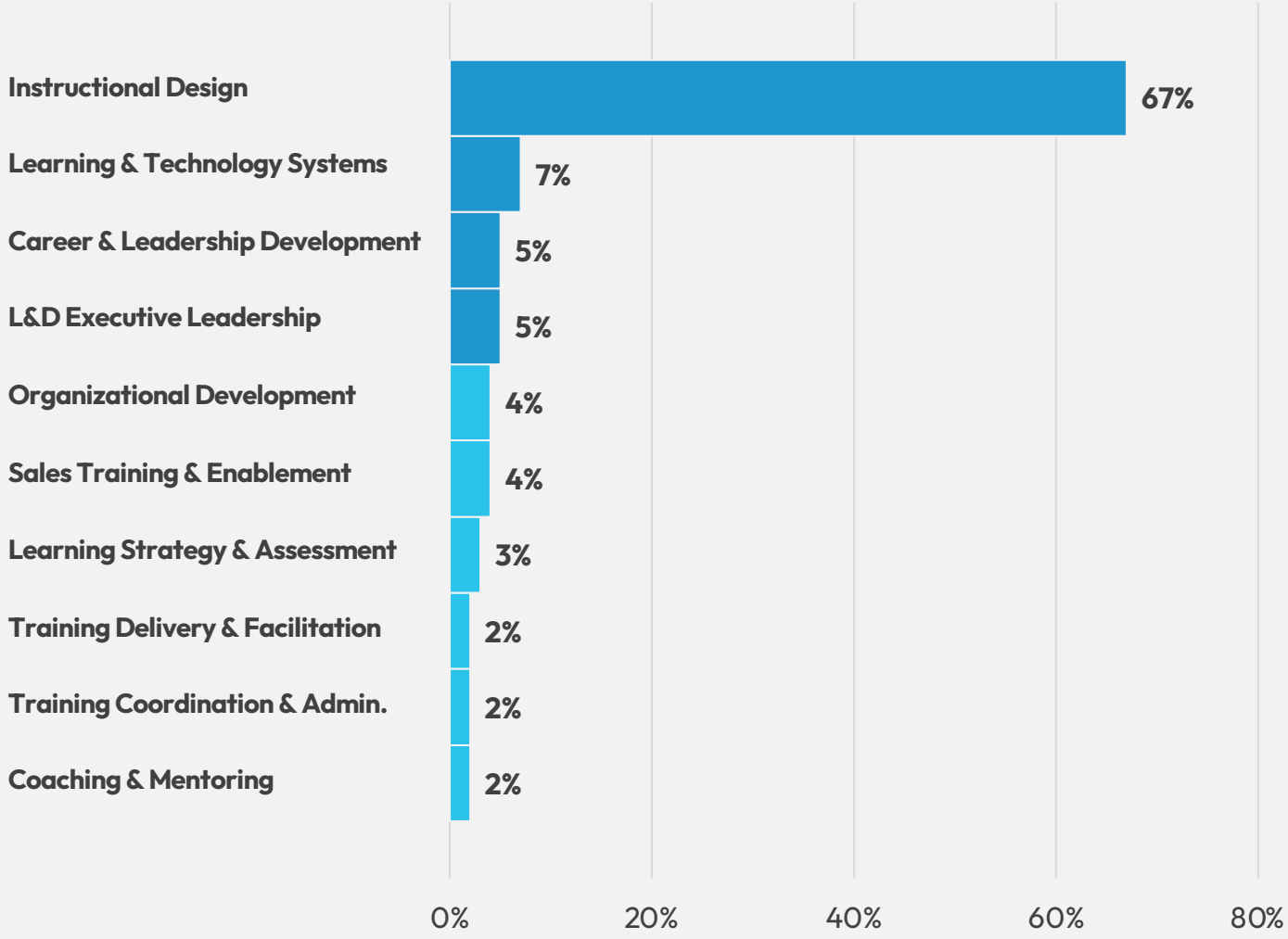


Job Level

Most participants (67%) identified their primary L&D role as instructional design—developing engaging learning materials, courses, and programs that drive performance. Smaller portions work in areas like learning and technology systems (7%), career and leadership development (5%), and executive leadership (5%), with others spread across specialties such as organizational development, training delivery, and sales enablement.

This strong focus on instructional design underscores its central role in L&D today. While the field spans many functions, from strategy to facilitation, organizations continue to rely heavily on professionals who can design impactful, learner-centered experiences that translate business needs into measurable results.

Which of the following best describes your role as a learning and development professional?



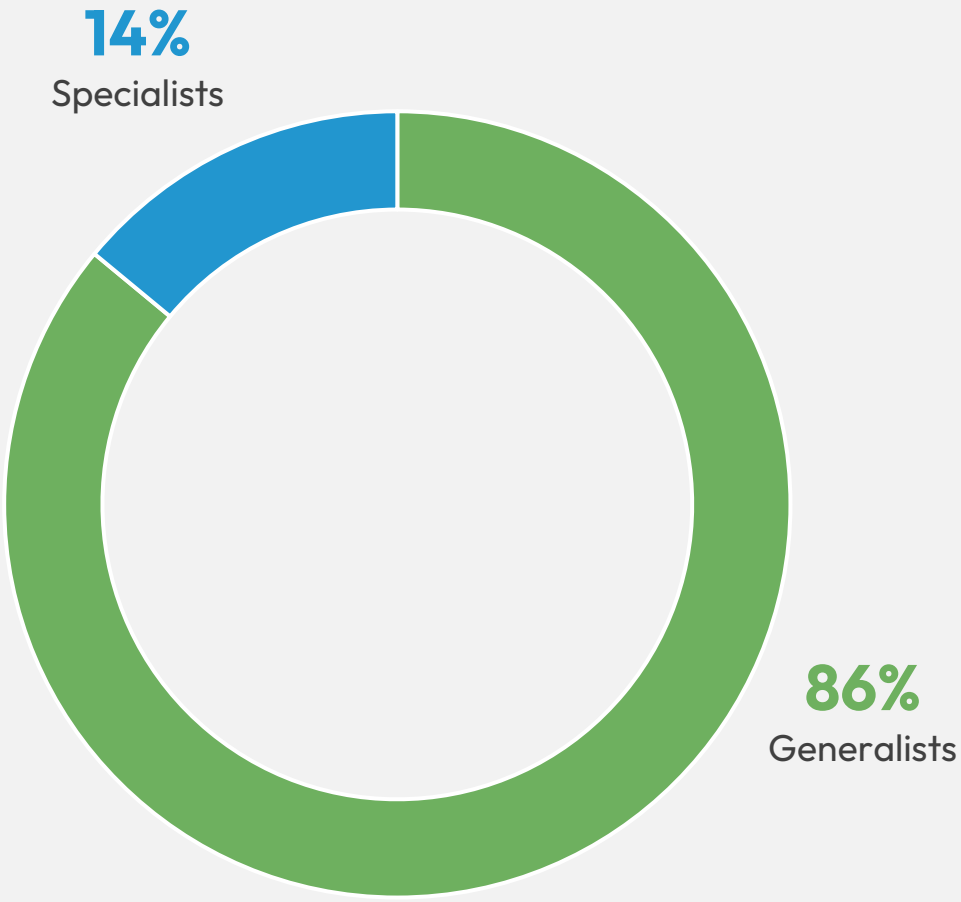
Instructional Design Type

Among participants working in instructional design, 86% identify as generalists—professionals with broad knowledge across the field who manage the full ADDIE process from analysis to evaluation.

The remaining 14% are specialists who focus on one specific phase of instructional design (such as development or evaluation) and bring deep expertise to that area.

The strong presence of generalists suggests that organizations value designers who can handle projects end-to-end, adapting to varied needs and contexts. While specialists play an important role, the preference for broad skill sets reflects the versatile, often multifaceted demands of instructional design roles today.

Is the function of your instructional design role a generalist of specialist?



Chapter One: Salaries

What L&D Professionals Are *Really* Earning

Inside the salary trends by role, industry, experience, education, and more.

Main Takeaway

Salary in L&D isn't one-size-fits-all—it's shaped by a mix of experience, education, and leadership responsibilities as well as by less obvious factors like company size, industry, and tenure.

As expected, pay increases with years of experience and higher levels of education, particularly for those in senior or executive roles. Professionals in larger organizations also tend to earn more, likely due to bigger budgets and more defined career ladders. Interestingly, some factors—like team structure (centralized vs. decentralized) or role focus (generalist vs. specialist)—had far less impact on salary than one might expect.

The good news? Most participants saw a raise within the past year, suggesting steady financial growth across the field. Whether you're just starting out or climbing the leadership track, salaries in L&D reflect a growing recognition of the field's value and impact.



Median salary across L&D professionals surveyed

$88,000

Insight #1

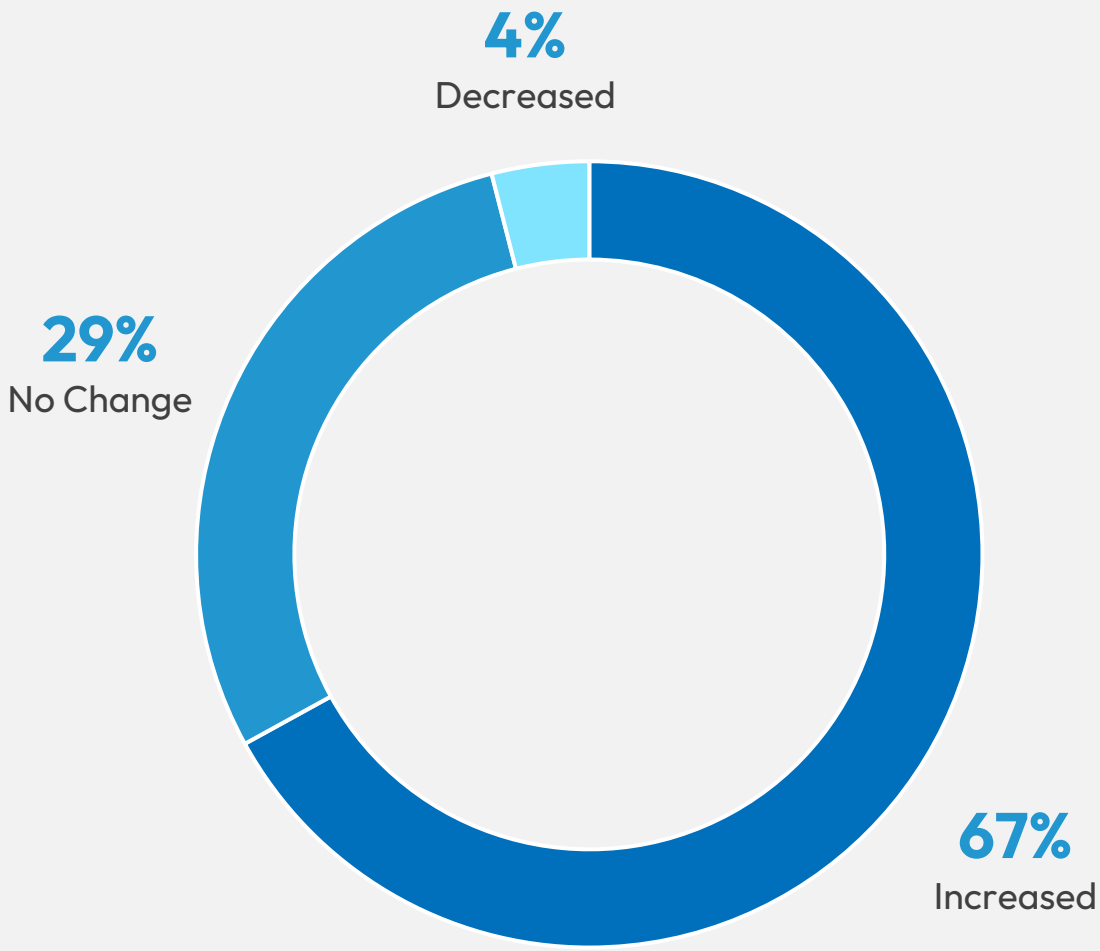
Raises in the past 12 months outnumbered cuts by a huge margin.

Financially, most participants are holding steady or moving up—96% reported either a raise or no change in their salary over the past year. Specifically, 67% received a base salary increase while 29% saw no change, and only 4% experienced a decrease.

Among those who received raises, the median increase was 4%, with roughly three-quarters of increases falling between 2% and 10%.

A few outliers reported jumps of 40–50%, likely tied to promotions, role changes, or company-wide salary adjustments.

Within the past 12 months, did your base salary increase, decrease or stay the same?



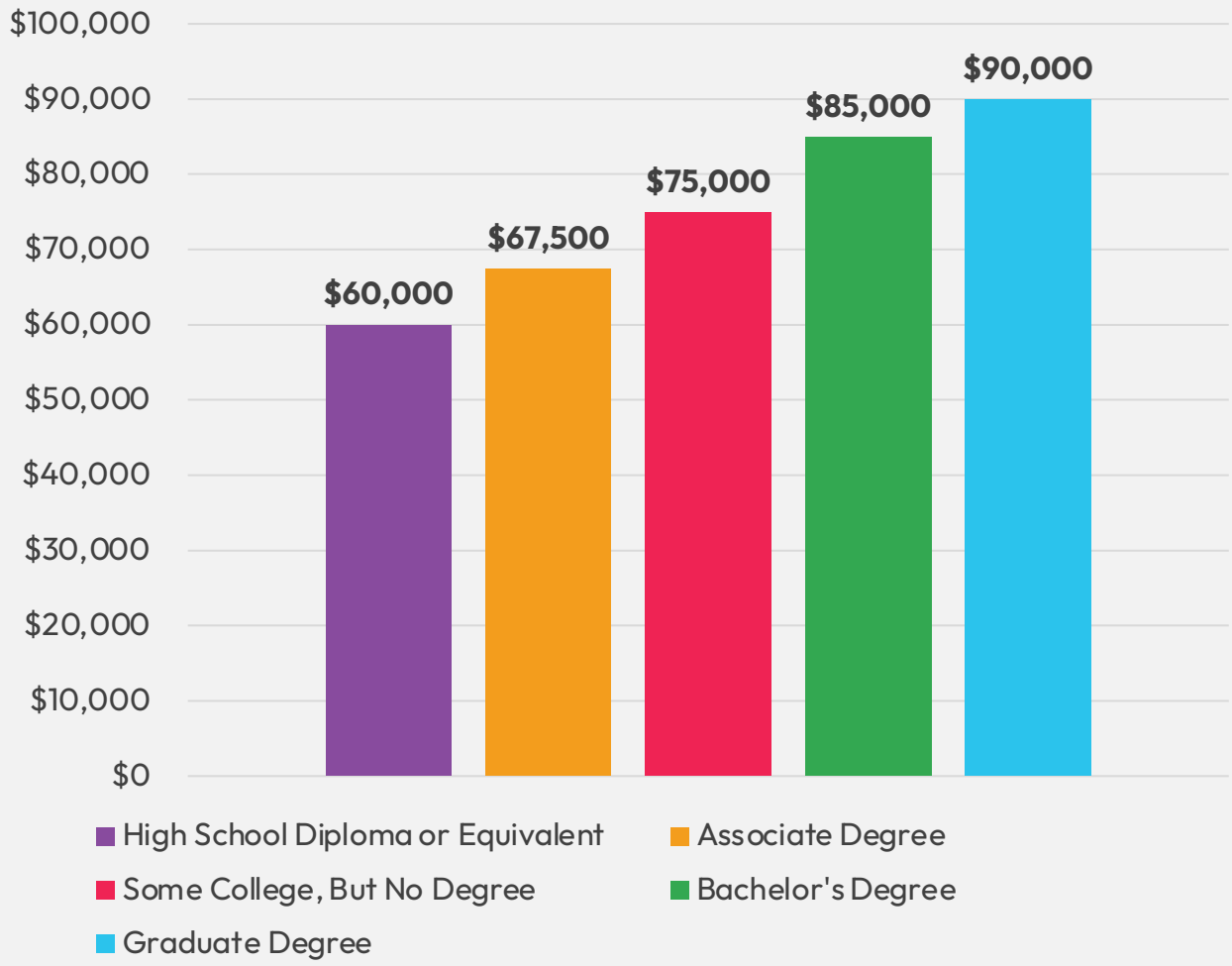
Insight #2

More education = more pay.

Education clearly plays a role in earning potential, but the impact varies. Participants with only a high school diploma report a median salary of $60K—about 32% below the overall median of $88K.

The biggest jump comes with earning a bachelor's degree, which adds an average of $17.5K over an associate degree.

Surprisingly, graduate degrees offer a smaller boost than you might expect, with only a $5K increase over a bachelor's.

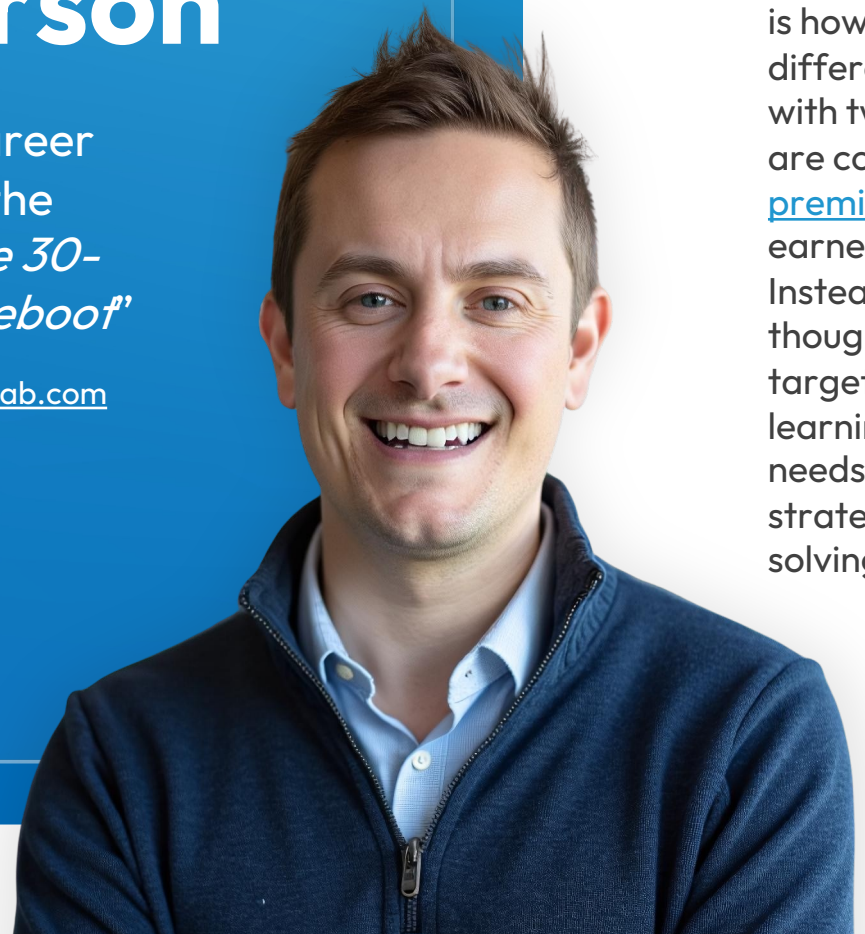


Voices of the Industry

Keith Anderson

Founder of Career Alchemy and the author of "*The 30-Day Career Reboot*"

www.careeralchemylab.com



"The 2025 salary data shows steady growth for L&D professionals, with experience and leadership still shaping earnings. But the real salary story is how AI is driving differentiation. Professionals with two or more AI-related skills are commanding a 43% salary premium—yet the highest earners aren't deep AI specialists. Instead, they're using AI as a thought partner, applying it in targeted ways—like personalizing learning paths or streamlining needs analysis—while keeping strategic vision and problem-solving front and center.

This is changing what drives earning power in our field. Salaries are increasingly tied not just to tenure, but to creativity, integration, and the ability to demonstrate the business impact of our work.

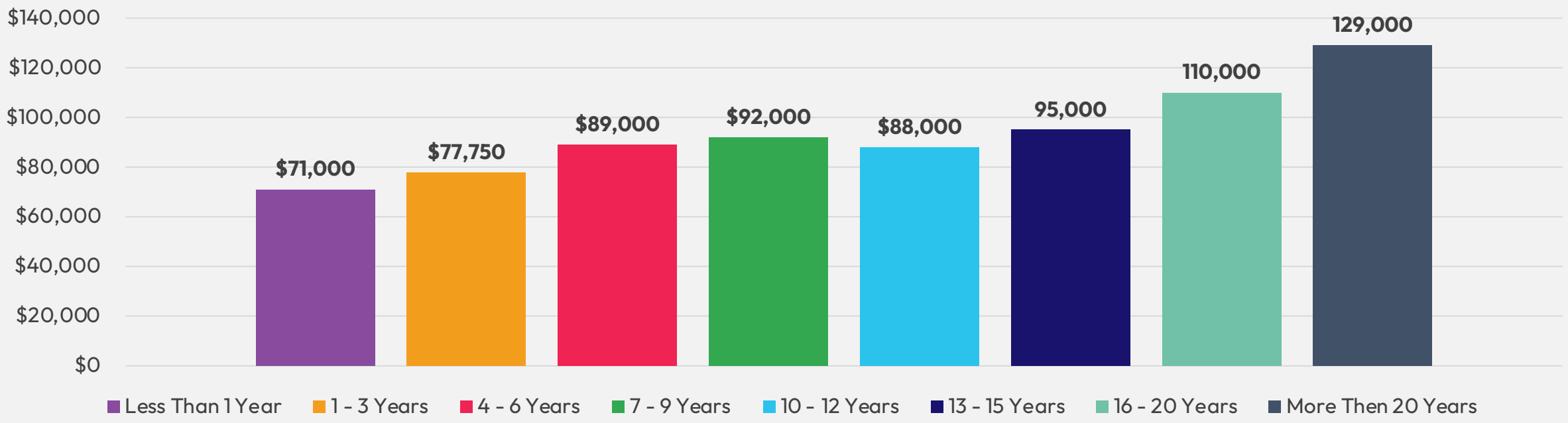
My advice: start small and visible. Pilot a project, measure results, and share them in your portfolio or on LinkedIn. In a market that rewards innovation alongside experience, showcasing how you've applied skills could be one of the clearest levers for boosting your salary potential."

Insight #3

Median salary increases steadily with more L&D experience.

Salaries in L&D start at around $71K for those with less than a year of experience and steadily increase with time in the field, reaching $129K for professionals with over 20 years under their belt.

However, growth isn't always linear—there's a noticeable plateau between 10 to 15 years of experience, where salaries tend to hover between $88K and $95K. Most of the significant gains happen after the 15-year mark, with those in the 20+ year range earning nearly 50% more than the overall median of $88K.

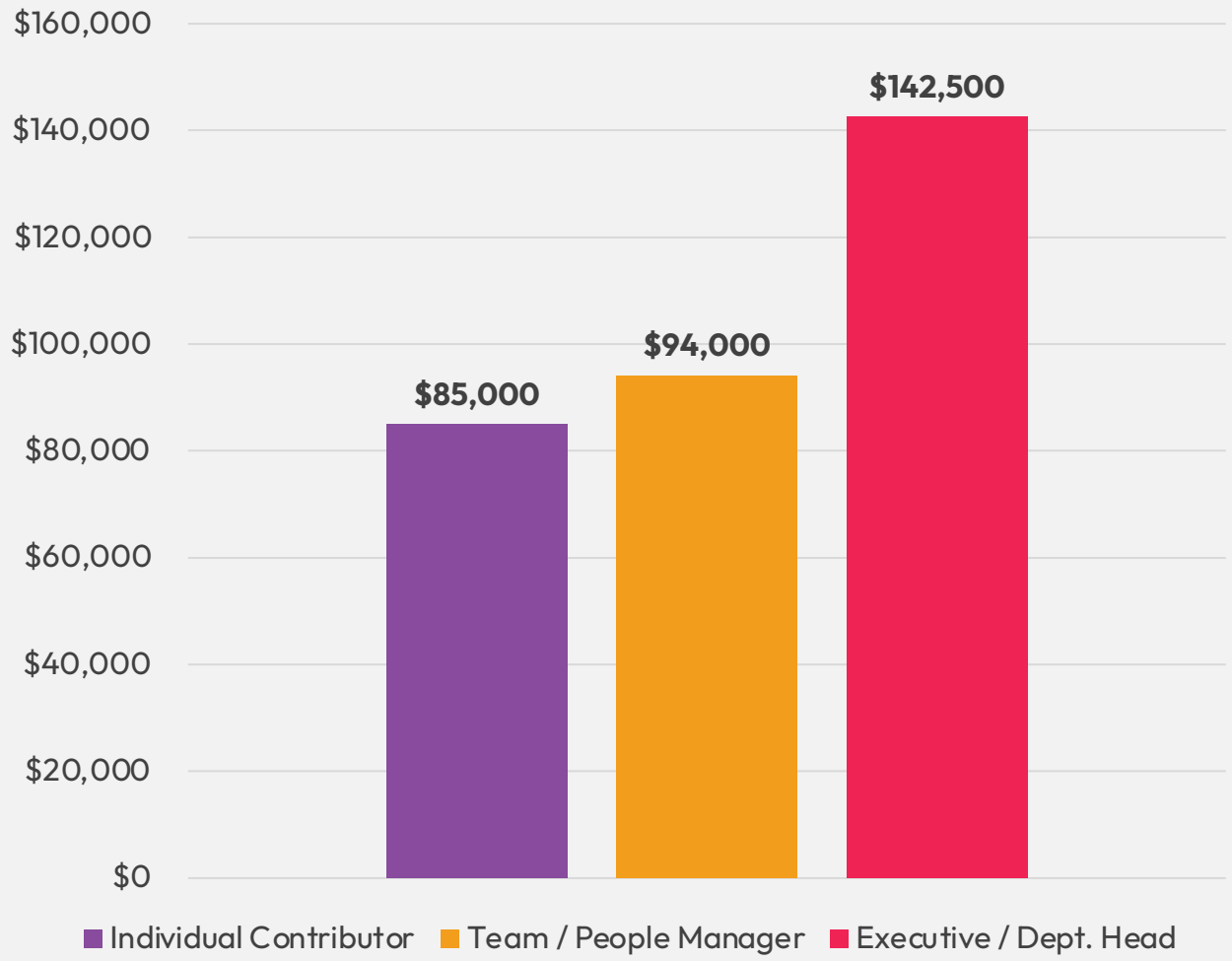


Insight #4

Leadership roles significantly boost earning potential, especially at the executive level.

Leadership responsibilities have a clear impact on salary. Individual contributors report a median salary of $85K, while team managers earn around $94K—a $9K bump for stepping into leadership.

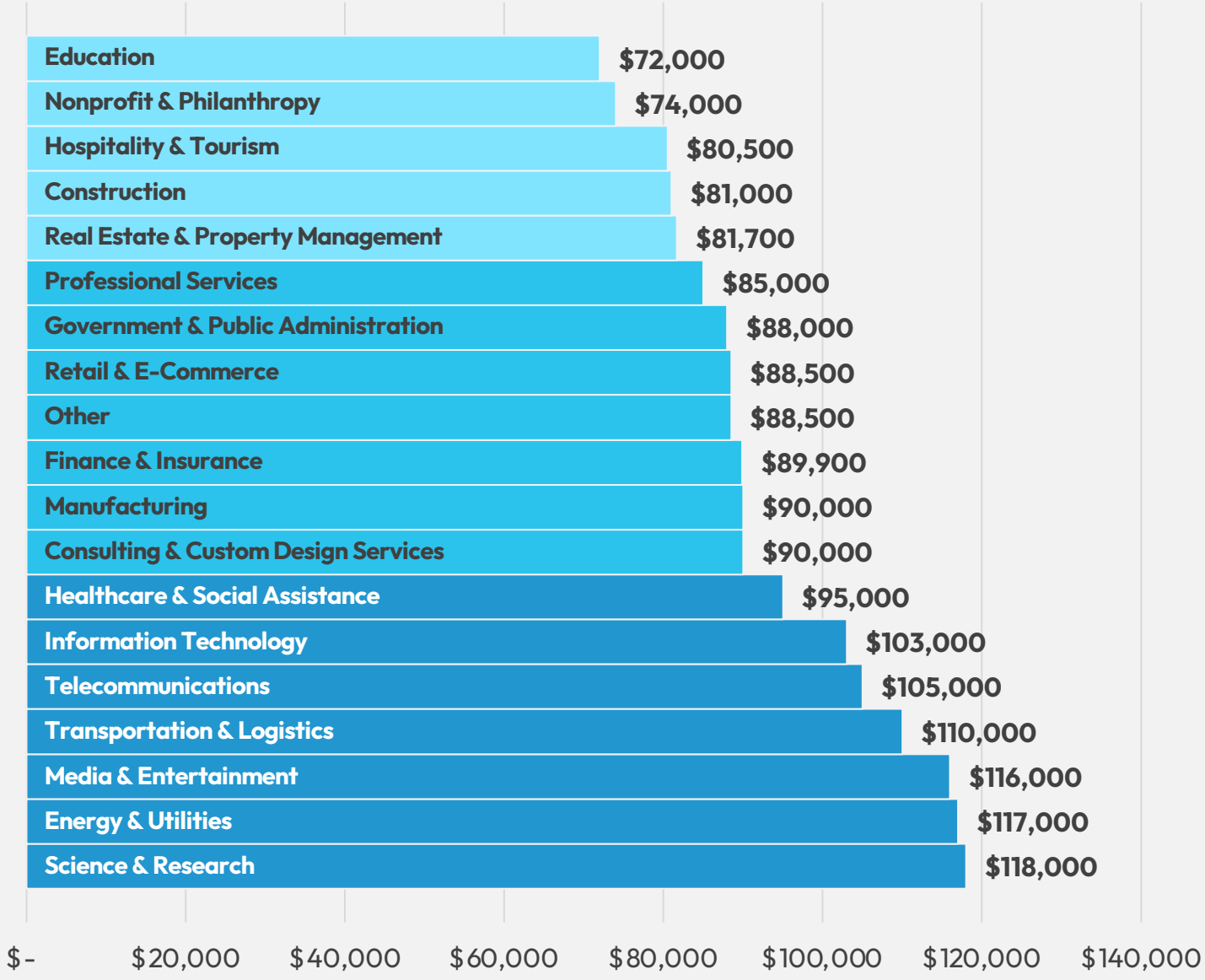
At the highest level, executives and department heads see a significant jump, with median earnings reaching $142.5K—nearly $50K more than their peers who manage teams.



Insight #5

Median salaries vary a lot by industry, and the field someone works in can have a big impact on pay.

Science & Research leads the pack at $118K, followed closely by Energy & Utilities ($117K) and Media & Entertainment ($116K). Education and Nonprofit sit at the lower end, with medians of $72K and $74K, respectively.

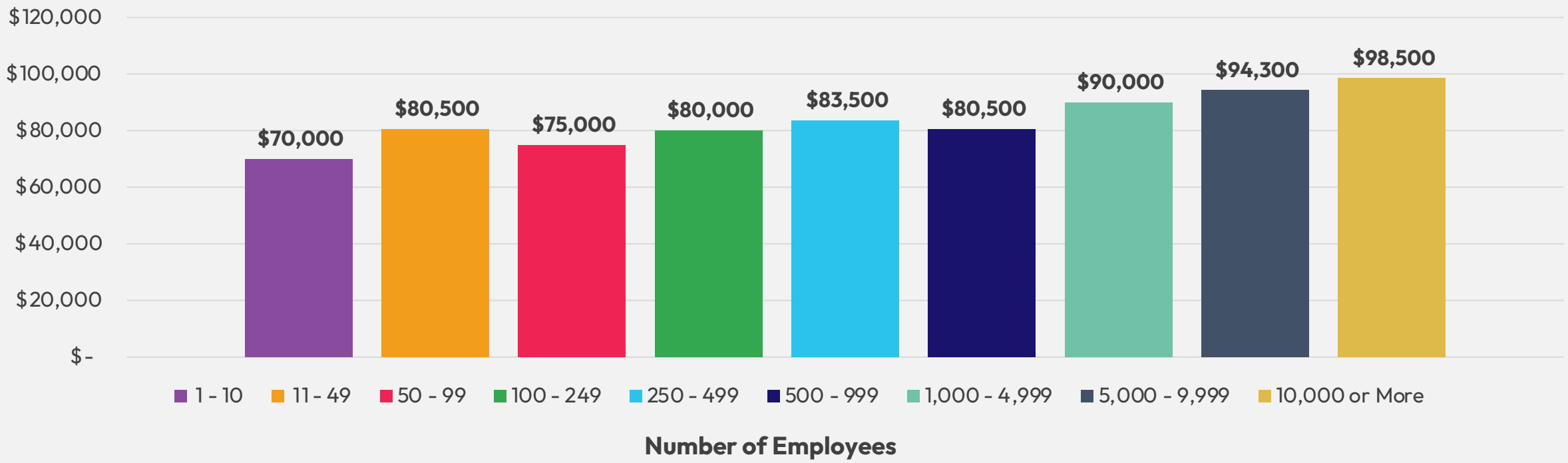


Insight #6

Median salary generally increases with company size.

Company size appears to play a notable role in salary. The most significant earnings are reported by those working at organizations with over 1,000 employees, where median salaries exceed $90K.

In contrast, the smallest companies—those with fewer than 10 employees—lag behind, with median pay around $70K. This gap may reflect the advantages of working in larger organizations, which often have bigger budgets, more structured compensation models, and clearer pathways for career advancement.







Tap Into It

Unlock the Hidden Job Market

Breaking into instructional design or eLearning can feel like shouting into the void—polishing your resume, perfecting your portfolio, and applying to dozens of jobs with nothing but silence in return. The truth? Many roles never make it to a public job posting. These opportunities live in the hidden job market—positions filled through relationships, referrals, and direct outreach long before they hit LinkedIn or Indeed.

This resource shows you exactly how to access that world without falling into the trap of empty "just network more" advice. You'll learn why most networking fails, how to replace transactional asks with authentic relationship-building, and practical ways to show your work both online and in person. Whether it's engaging meaningfully on LinkedIn, "working out loud" to showcase your skills, or connecting with your local ATD chapter, you'll discover strategies that not only get you noticed—but get you hired.

🔗 Read the Full Guide to the Hidden Job Market

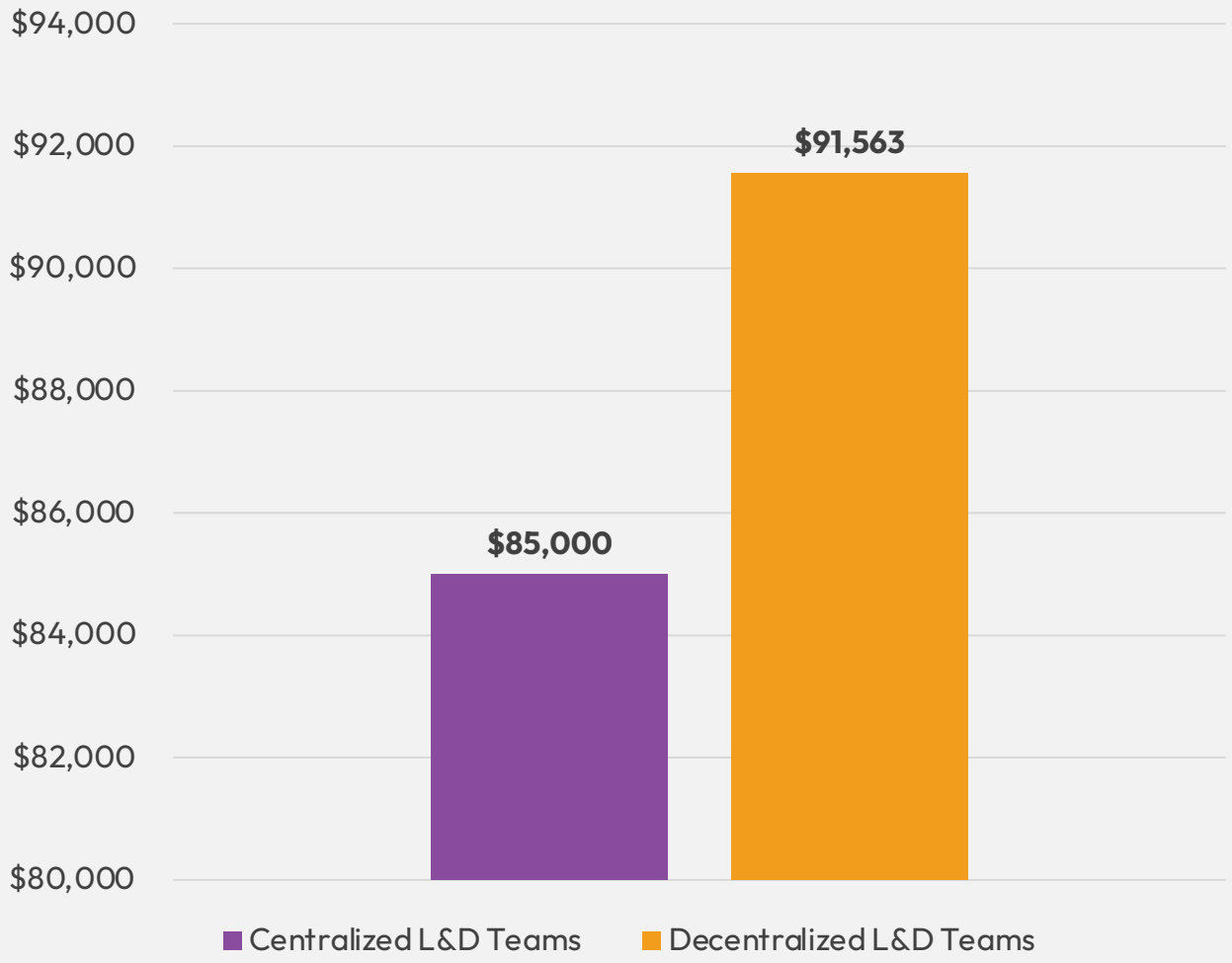
Insight #7

Organizational structure has an impact on compensation.

Team structure appears to influence compensation in the L&D world. Participants working within decentralized learning teams—where learning functions are embedded across departments or business units—report higher median salaries at $91.5K.

In contrast, those in centralized teams—where learning is managed by a single, core L&D department—earn slightly less, with a median of $85K.

This difference may reflect the broader scope, cross-functional collaboration, or strategic alignment often expected of decentralized roles.

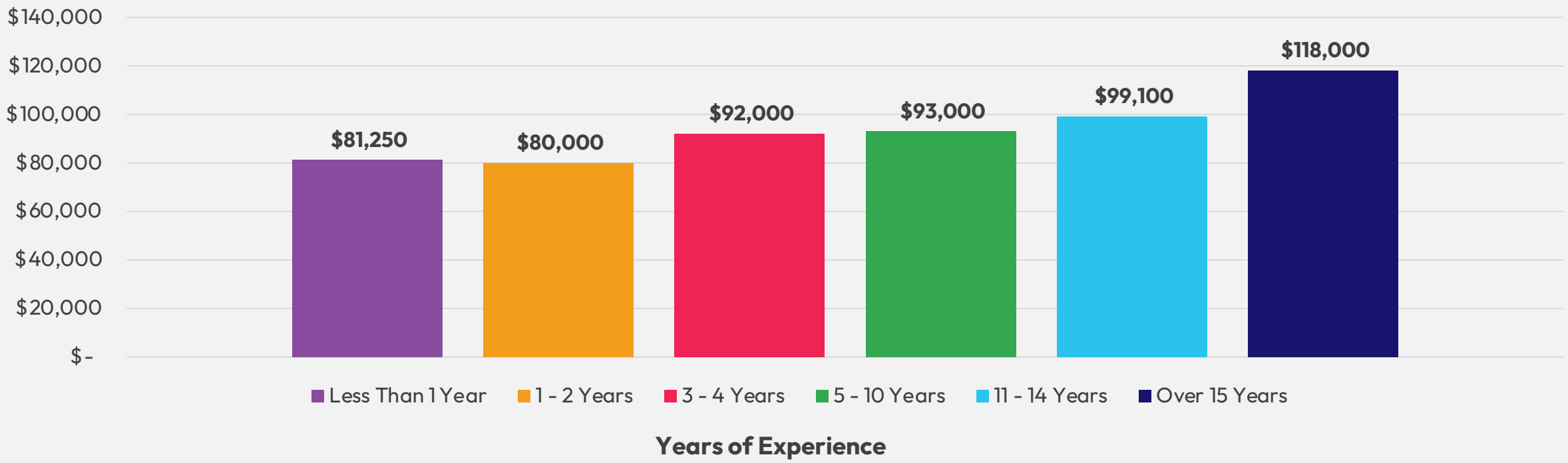


Insight #8

Median salary increases steadily with tenure.

Participants with less than a year at their current company report a median salary of $81K—likely reflecting entry-level roles, onboarding status, or limited time for internal advancement.

On the other hand, those who have remained with the same organization for over 15 years see the highest returns, earning a median of $118K. That's a $37K difference, which may be attributed to long-term promotions, retention raises, increased institutional knowledge, or progression into senior leadership and strategic learning roles over time.



Insight #9

Role focus doesn't impact salary.

Despite differences in the scope of responsibilities, instructional design generalists and specialists report the same median salary of $85K.

Generalists often juggle a wide range of tasks across the design and development spectrum, while specialists may focus deeply on a specific area—such as eLearning development, facilitation, or learning strategy.

The parity in pay suggests that employers currently place equal value on both breadth and depth of expertise, recognizing the importance of versatile skill sets as well as focused technical proficiency in today's L&D landscape.



Chapter Two: Portfolios

Portfolios That Open Doors

What hiring managers want—and how job seekers are showcasing their skills.

Main Takeaway

Portfolios have become a defining factor in L&D hiring—but expectations and execution don't always align. While most hiring managers consider portfolios essential for evaluating design skills, only about half of candidates actually share one.

Many individual contributors recognize their importance and are actively building or planning a portfolio, but they often only update them when job hunting—rather than keeping them fresh.

And while portfolios often focus on eLearning modules, hiring managers want more: Variety, context, and evidence of impact. The most effective portfolios don't just showcase the work—they tell the story behind it.



66% **...of hiring managers say portfolios are important when evaluating candidates.**

71% **...of job seekers say their portfolio helped land interviews or job offers.**

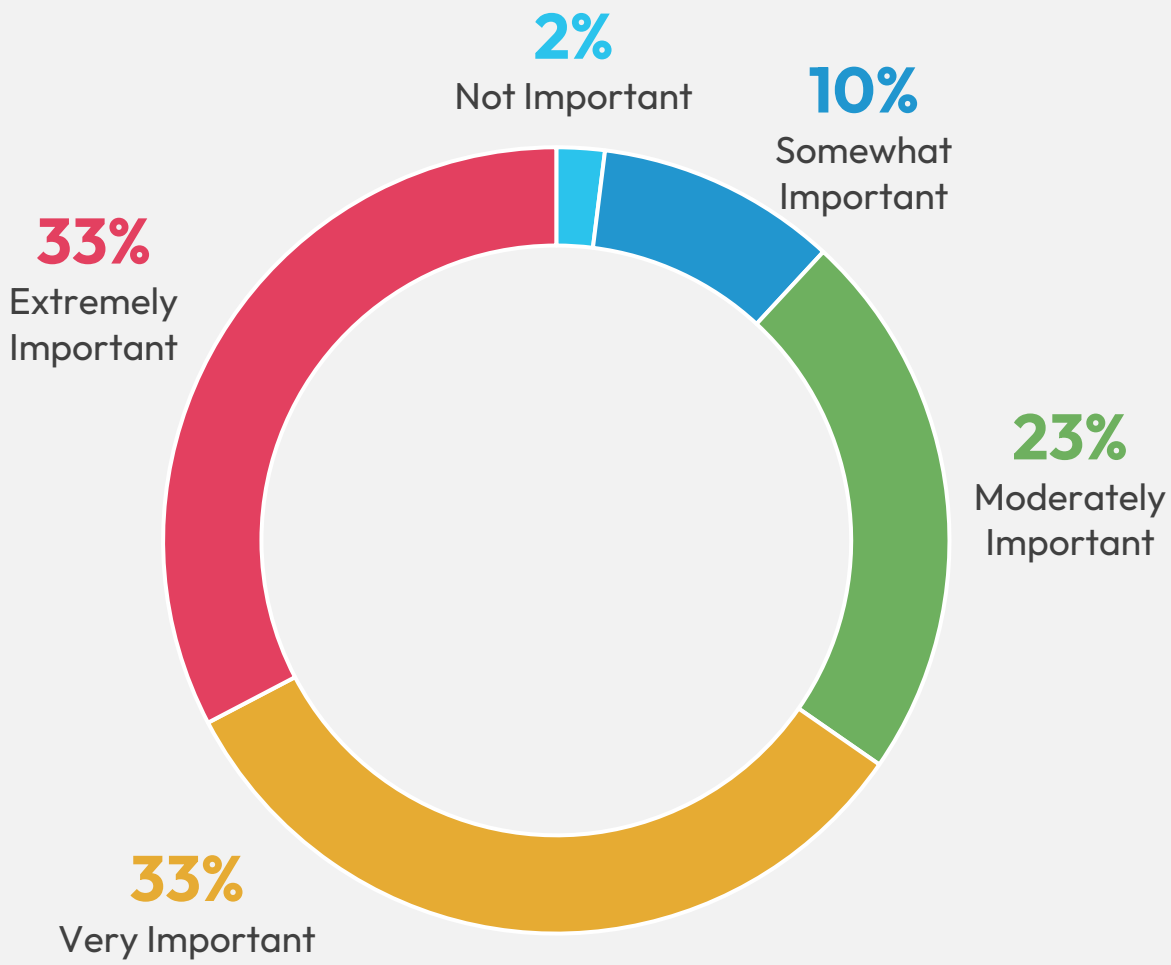
Insight #1

Portfolios matter to hiring managers—a lot.

When evaluating candidates for instructional design roles, most hiring managers place strong emphasis on seeing real work. In fact, 66% rated portfolios or work samples as highly important—selecting a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale—with a full one-third calling them extremely important.

Only 12% considered them low priority. While not universally required, this data highlights a clear trend: For many hiring managers, a resume alone isn't enough. They want to see how candidates think, solve problems, and apply their skills—something only a well-crafted portfolio can reveal.

When making a hiring decision, how important is it to review an instructional designer's portfolio or work samples?



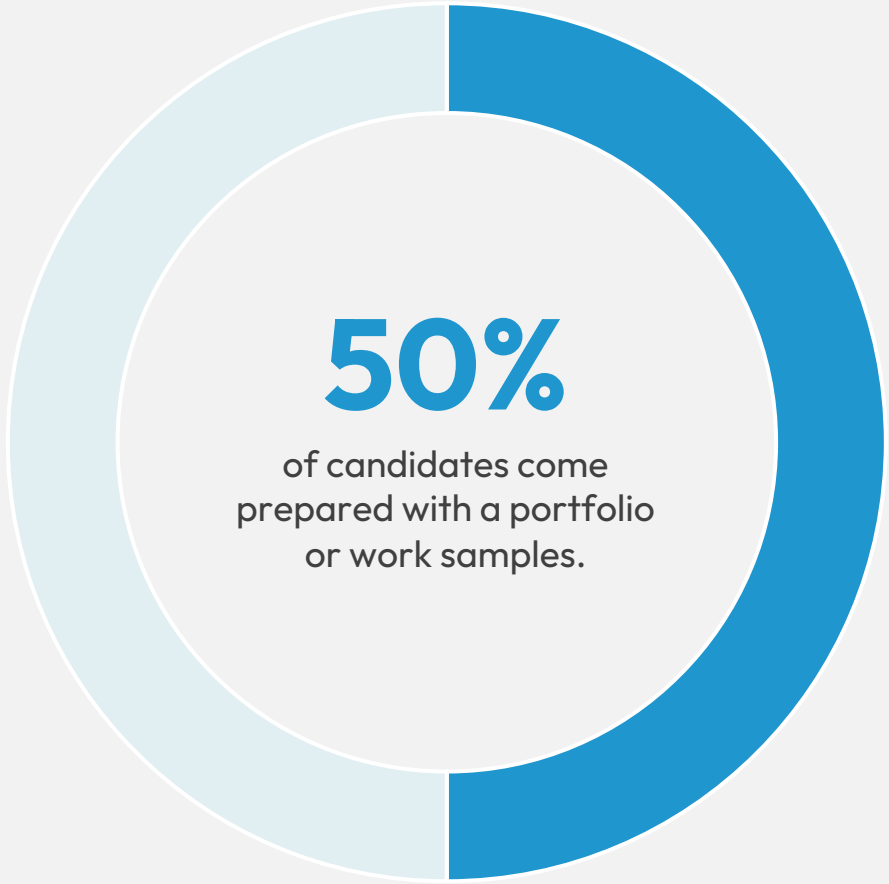
Insight #2

Half of applicants have a portfolio or work samples.

When hiring managers interview instructional designers, the presence of a portfolio is far from guaranteed. Reported rates ranged from 0% to 100%, but the most common response was just 50%—meaning only half of candidates typically come prepared with one.

This gap suggests that while many do showcase their work, a significant number still apply without a portfolio. The reasons vary: Confidentiality concerns, lack of time or technical skills, or simply not realizing that portfolios are often expected in today's market.

When interviewing instructional designers, what percentage (%) of applicants have a portfolio or work samples?



Voices of the Industry

Heidi Kirby, PhD

Founder

Useful Stuff

www.getusefulstuff.com



"Too many job seekers build portfolios based on social media trends instead of what hiring managers actually want. A strong portfolio should showcase a range of project types, clearly explain your process, and show how learning impact was—or could be—measured. It's not enough to display flashy assets; you need to demonstrate how you apply learning theory and solve real-world problems. Yet the data says otherwise: 95% of portfolios include eLearning, but the next most common format drops to 60%. If hiring managers want variety, why are most portfolios showing just one type?

Even more surprising, 66% of hiring managers say portfolios are critical, yet only half of candidates have one ready. It's fine if your portfolio is a work in progress—but submitting unfinished or unpolished samples raises concerns about your time management. Yes, constraints are real, but creativity and resourcefulness are part of the job. Your portfolio is a direct reflection of your commitment to the craft. Don't waste energy on fancy visuals or animations that don't reinforce your instructional thinking. Focus on showing how you build effective learning—because that's what truly sets you apart."

Insight #3

Great portfolios show process, versatility, and results.

When it comes to what matters most in a portfolio, hiring managers consistently emphasize substance over flash. They're looking for evidence of sound instructional design, real-world impact, and a polished, thoughtful presentation. It's not enough to simply showcase finished products—portfolios should reveal the designer's thinking, process, and decision-making.

Hiring managers also expect to see a range of tools and formats, along with clear, accessible, and well-organized design. Ultimately, portfolios that demonstrate effectiveness and intentionality stand out the most.

When hiring an instructional designer, what key elements do you look for in an applicant's portfolio or work samples?

Portfolio Elements	What Hiring Managers Look For
Instructional Design Quality	Adult learning principles, instructional strategies, sound design, and learning objectives
Demonstrated Process	Clear explanation of needs analysis, design thinking, learning outcomes, and development
Results & Impact	Evidence of training effectiveness, performance impact, scalability, and evaluation data
Diversity of Work	Multiple modalities (eLearning, job aids, video, etc.), not just one tool like Rise or Storyline
Creativity & Innovation	Unique approaches, thoughtful visuals, creative use of technology
Technical Skill	Proficiency in tools, formatting, interactivity, accessibility, and error-free presentation
Clarity & Professionalism	Clear writing, logical structure, branding consistency, polished design

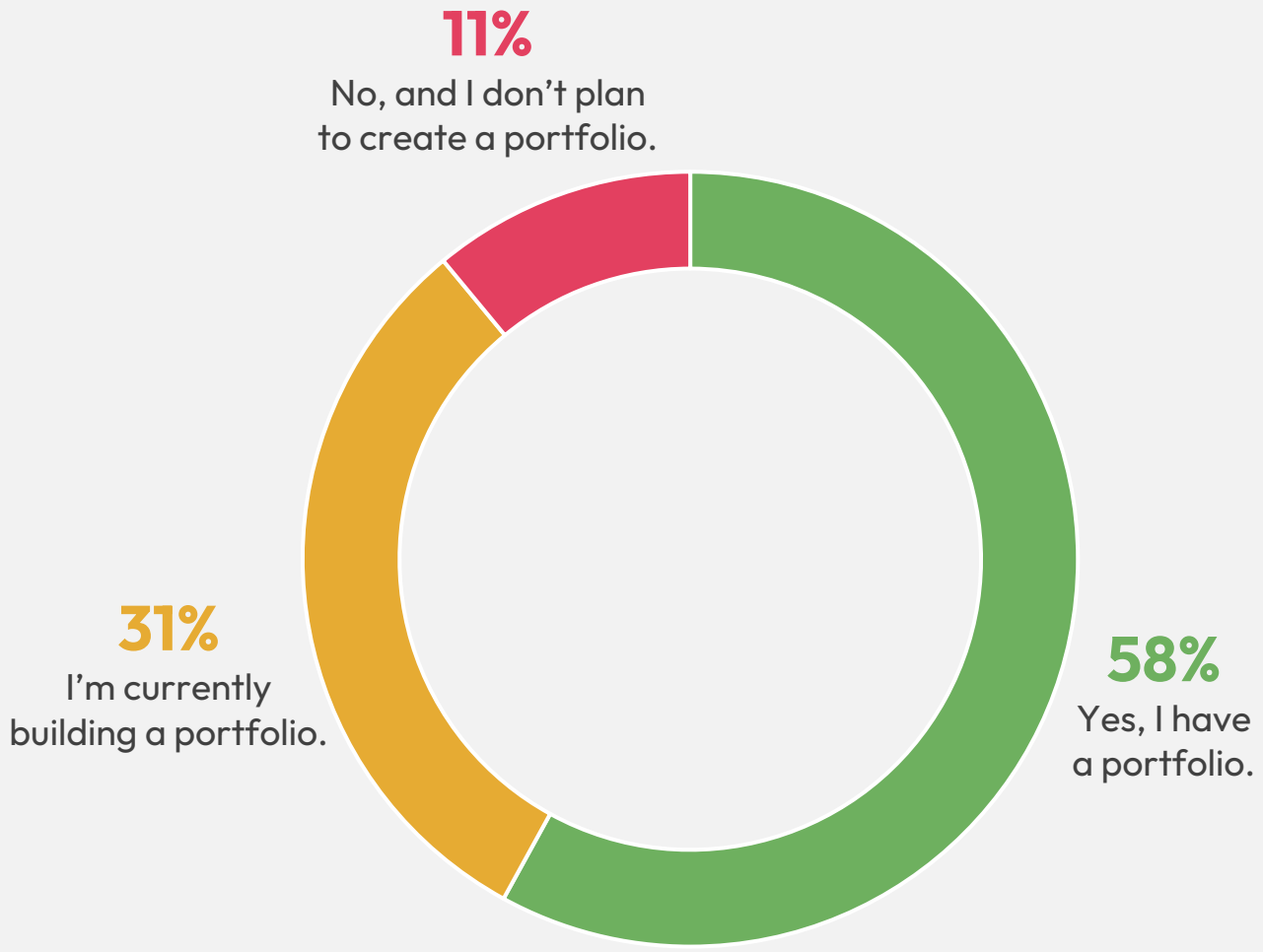
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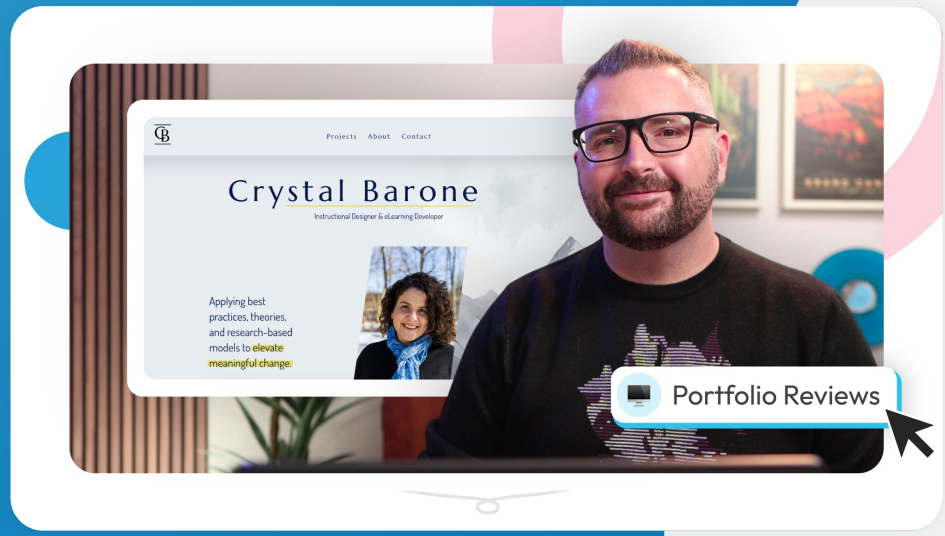
Having a portfolio is the new standard.

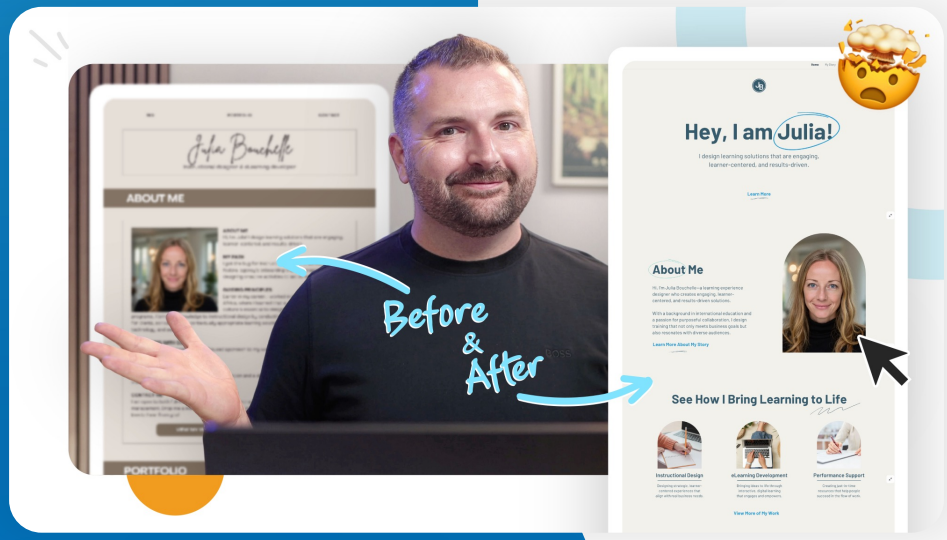
Portfolios are becoming the norm among individual contributors in L&D. A full 89% either have one or are actively building one to showcase their work, while just 11% say they don't have a portfolio and don't plan to create one.

Although many professionals already have portfolios in place, a significant number are still in the process of assembling theirs—reflecting a growing recognition of how essential portfolios have become in the field.

Do you currently have a portfolio showcasing your work?







Get Noticed

Design a Portfolio that Gets You Noticed

Your portfolio isn't just a collection of projects—it's your professional story, and it needs to convince hiring managers you can do the work. In these two real-world portfolio reviews, you'll see exactly what makes a portfolio stand out. First, watch how Crystal Barone, a transitioning teacher, built a clean, authentic site that turns her teaching background into a strength, blending it seamlessly with scenario-based learning projects and strong instructional design principles.

🔗 Watch Crystal's Portfolio Review

Then, follow the transformation of Julia Bouchelle's Canva-built portfolio, redesigned in just two hours to be more polished, focused, and easy to navigate. Along the way, you'll pick up practical tips on layout, structure, storytelling, and common design mistakes to avoid—so you can create a portfolio that's as impressive to look at as it is to read.

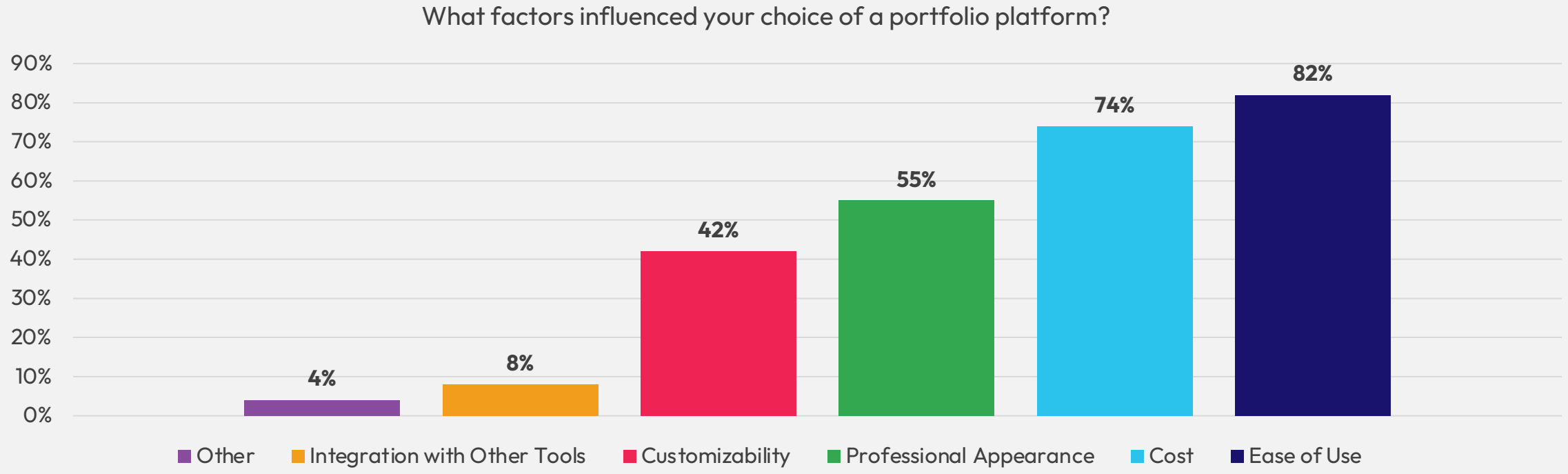
🔗 Watch Julia's Portfolio Before & After

Insight #5

Ease of use and affordability drive portfolio platform choices.

When it comes to choosing a platform for their portfolio, most professionals prioritize practicality. Ease of use topped the list at 82% followed closely by cost at 74%.

Professional appearance also carried weight, with 55% citing it as a key factor. Customizability mattered to a smaller group (42%), while integration with other tools ranked lowest at just 8%—suggesting that simplicity and affordability often outweigh advanced functionality.

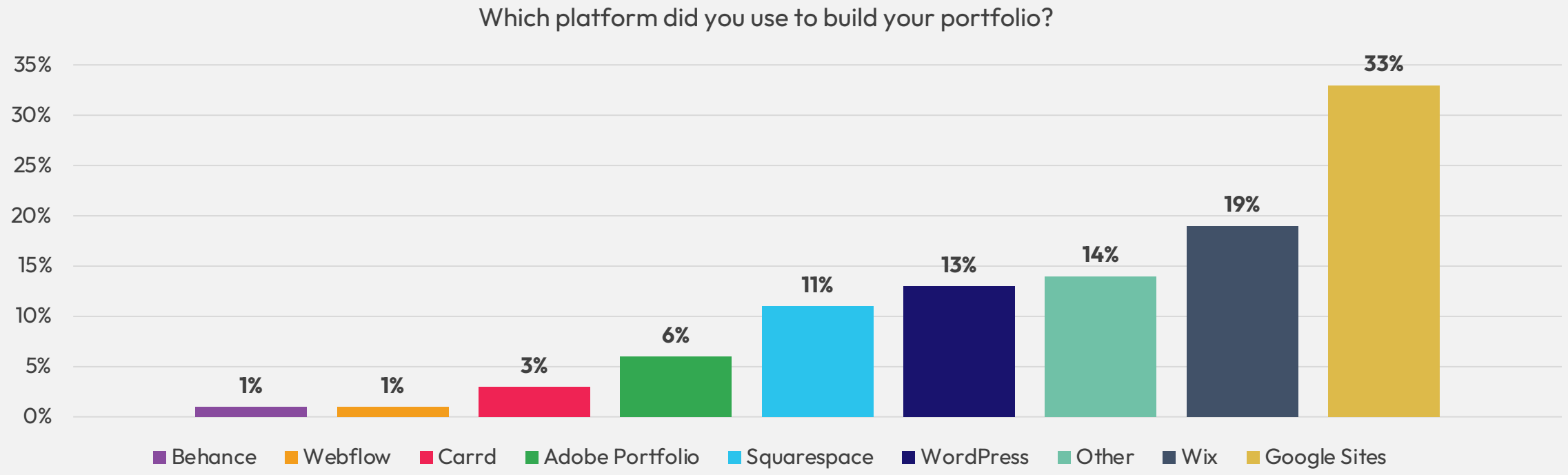


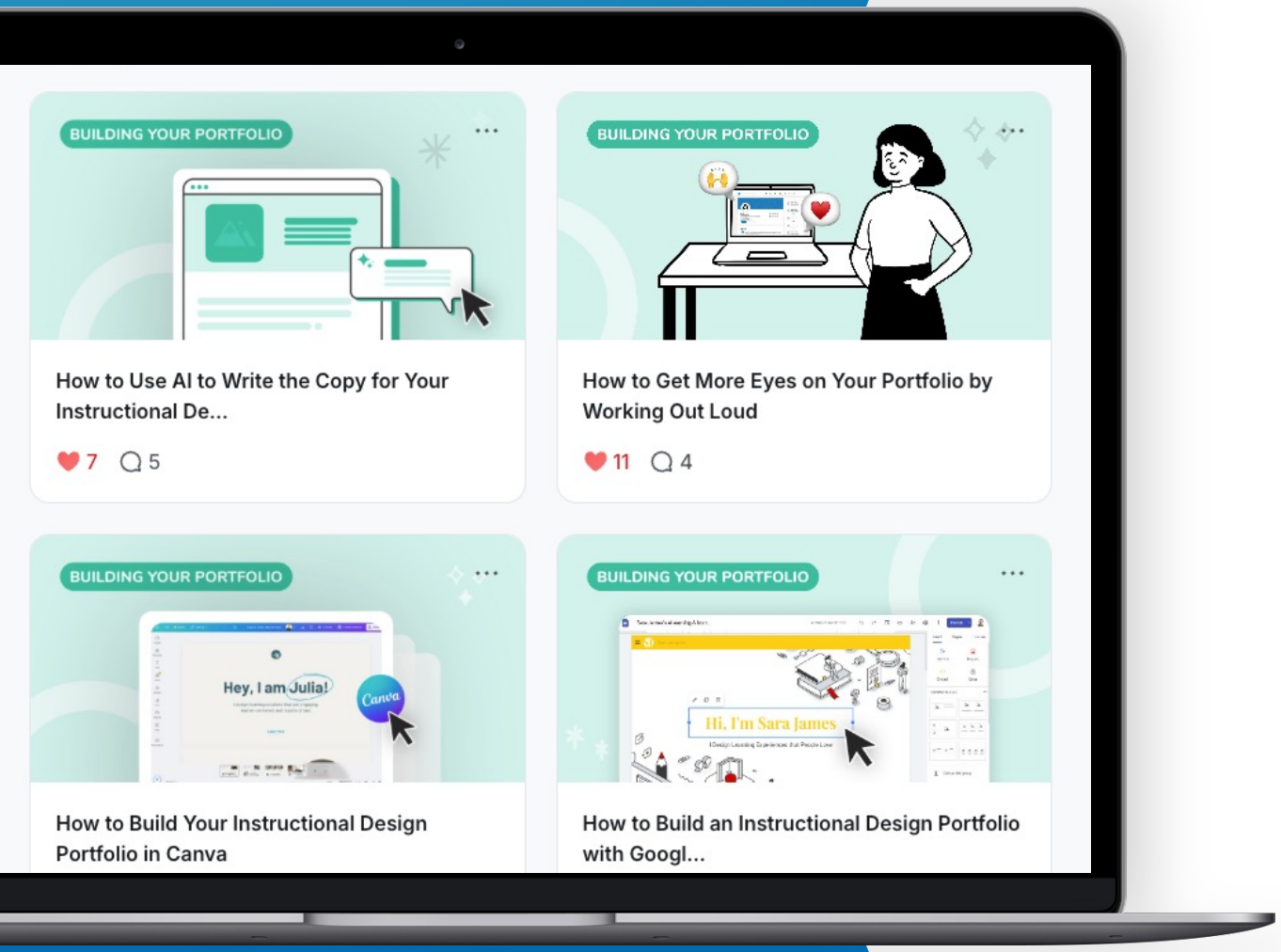
Insight #6

When it comes to choosing a specific portfolio platform, easy beats fancy.

Among individual contributors with a portfolio, Google Sites leads the pack, used by 33% of respondents. Wix (19%), WordPress (13%), and Squarespace (11%) rounded out the majority.

Other platforms—like Adobe Portfolio, Carrd, and Behance—are far less common, each used by only a small percentage. The widespread use of Google Sites reflects what matters most to participants: Ease of use and affordability rather than advanced customization or premium design features.





Put it into Practice

Build a Portfolio That Gets You Hired

If you're ready to start (or refresh) your instructional design and eLearning development portfolio, you don't have to figure it out on your own. Inside our Knowledge Base, you'll find a collection of free resources to help you plan, design, and showcase your work—whether you're building your first project or polishing an existing portfolio.

From step-by-step guides and example layouts to tips on writing project descriptions that stand out, these resources are designed to help you create a portfolio that actually works in a hiring process—not just one that looks good. Visit the Knowledge Base to explore the full collection and get inspired by examples from other professionals in the field.

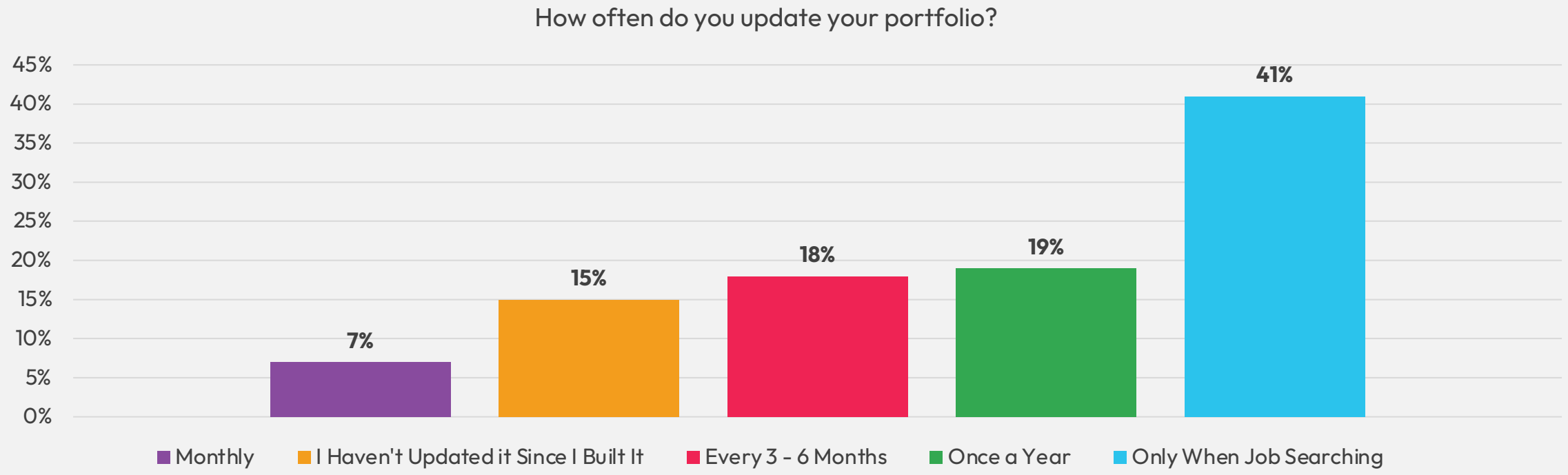
🔗 Visit the Knowledge Base for Portfolio Resources

Insight #7

Portfolio updates are often tied to job search efforts.

Among participants with a portfolio, the most common approach is reactive—41% update it only when actively job searching.

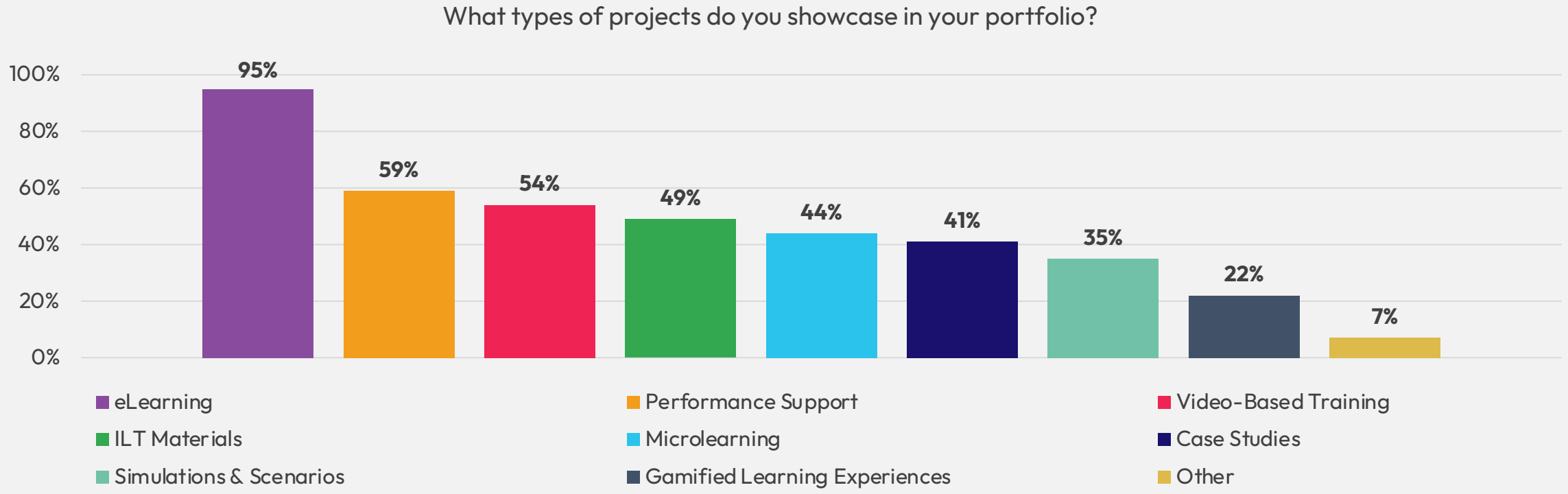
Far fewer take a proactive approach: 19% update theirs annually, 18% every 3–6 months, and just 7% on a monthly basis. Notably, 15% haven't updated their portfolio at all since creating it. This suggests that for many, a portfolio serves primarily as a job-hunting tool rather than an ongoing reflection of professional growth.

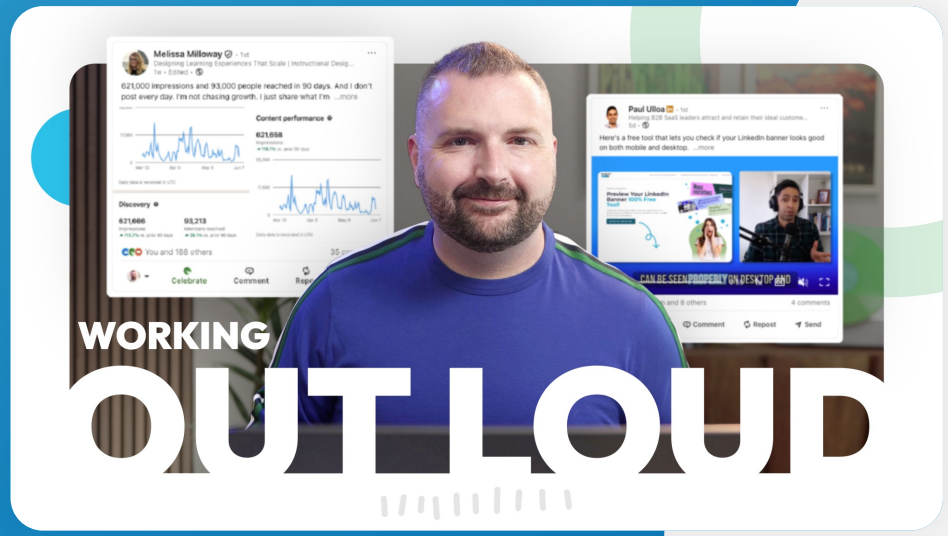


Insight #8

Portfolios showcase mostly examples of eLearning projects.

eLearning modules dominate portfolios, included by 95% of participants—well ahead of other project types. Performance support (59%), videos (54%), and ILT materials (49%) are also common, while microlearning, case studies, and simulations appear less often. Gamified learning remains rare at 22%. The focus on eLearning likely reflects demand and ease of sharing, but adding variety—like job aids or case studies—can showcase versatility and help candidates stand out.







Show Your Work

Get Seen & Get Hired by Working Out Loud

If you've built your instructional design or eLearning portfolio but still feel invisible to hiring managers, the problem may not be your skills—it may be your visibility. In this video, you'll learn what "working out loud" really means and why your portfolio alone isn't enough to stand out in today's competitive job market. With real-world examples from Mel Milloway and Paul Ulloa, you'll see how sharing your process and progress (even if it's not perfect) can attract real job opportunities—without awkward cold pitches or begging for attention.

🔗 Watch How Working Out Loud Gets You Noticed

In this in-depth conversation with industry leader Mel Milloway, you'll discover how working out loud can transform your career by making your work work for you. Mel and Tim dive into strategies for sharing your projects authentically, building credibility without feeling salesy, and avoiding common mistakes that can hold you back. You'll also hear personal stories and lessons learned—from the career wins to the "I wish I'd done that sooner" moments—that will help you approach visibility with confidence.

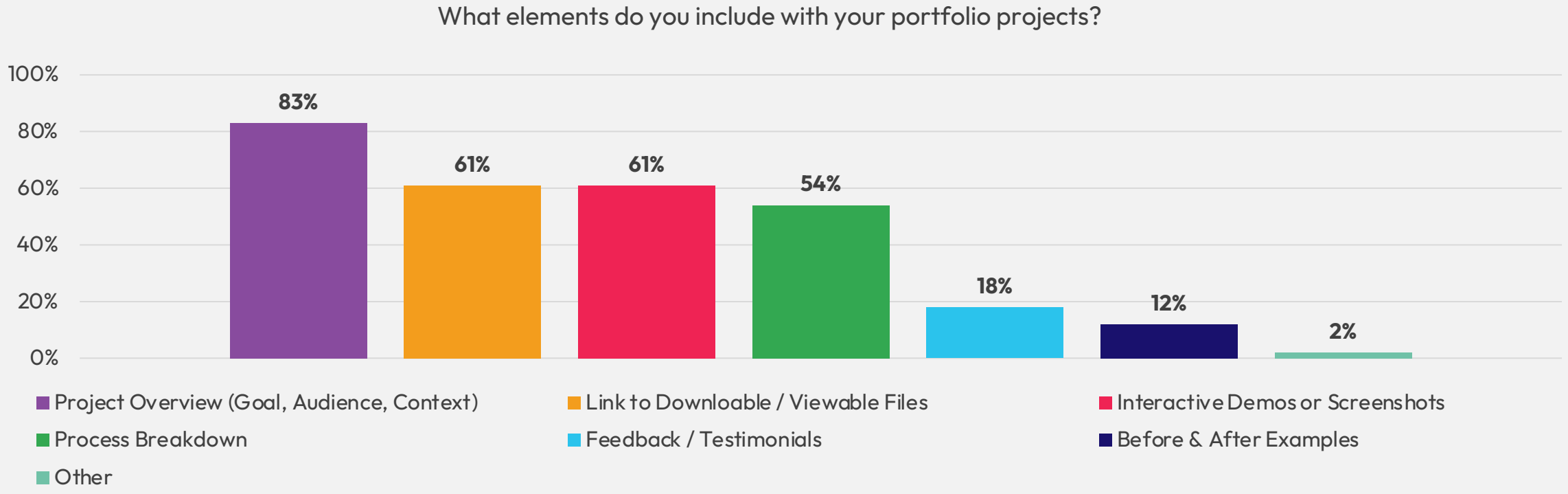
🔗 Watch My Conversation with Mel Milloway

Insight #9

Portfolios include context, not just content.

When asked about the elements they include in portfolio projects, most participants (83%) share a project overview outlining goals, audience, and context. Many also include interactive demos or file links (61%) and process breakdowns (54%).

Fewer go further by showcasing stakeholder feedback (18%) or before-and-after examples (12%)—both of which can add credibility and depth. The strongest portfolios offer transparency. Providing context and process alongside final deliverables highlights critical thinking, problem-solving, and alignment with learning goals. A little behind-the-scenes goes a long way.



Insight #10

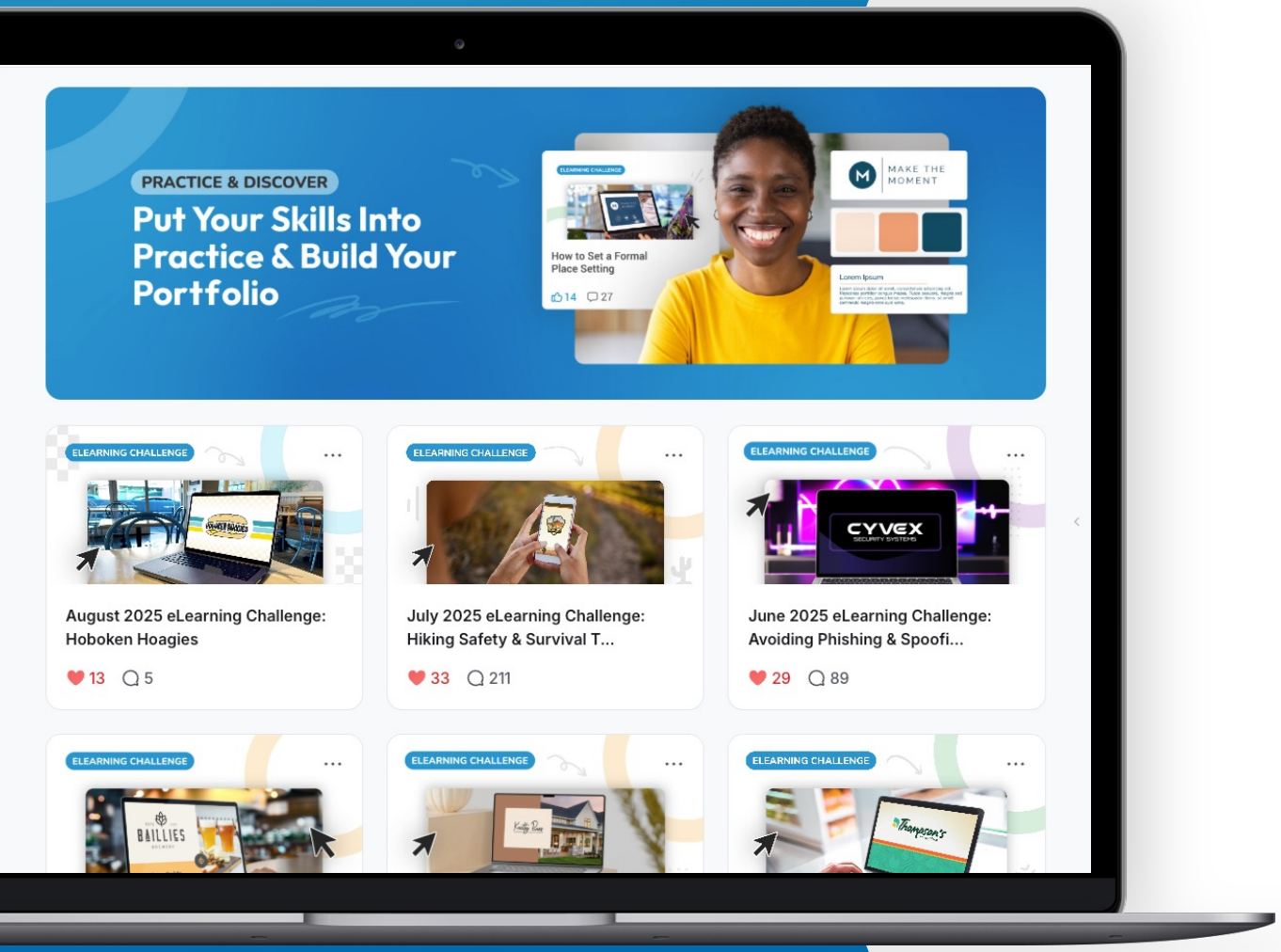
Confidentiality, time, and cost are the big blockers with portfolios.

Building and maintaining a portfolio isn't always straightforward for individual contributors. Many face barriers like confidentiality restrictions that limit what they can publicly share along with time constraints and the financial burden of hosting or design tools.

These challenges are often compounded by a lack of clear guidance on what a strong portfolio should include, as well as technical and strategic hurdles—like knowing how to present their work effectively or translate complex projects into portfolio-friendly formats. For many, it's not a question of whether they should build a portfolio but how to do it well with the resources they have.

What challenges, if any, have you faced in building or maintaining your portfolio?

Challenge	Summary
Proprietary & Confidential Work	Many cannot share their best work because it contains proprietary or confidential information or is protected under NDAs.
Time Constraints	Finding time to build or update a portfolio while working full-time is a significant barrier.
Cost & Tool Access	High costs of tools (like Articulate, Rise, or custom domains) and website hosting limit portfolio development.
Technical Limitations	Technical issues with platforms (like Wix, WordPress, or AWS) and embedding content (like SCORM files or Storyline projects) create friction.
Content Selection & Strategy	Many struggle to determine what to include in their portfolio and how to show breadth and depth of skill effectively.
Rebuilding or Creating from Scratch	Because existing work is off-limits, respondents often need to recreate or build mock projects, which takes significant effort.
Maintenance & Motivation	Once a job is secured, portfolios are rarely updated due to low motivation or shifting priorities.
Audience Uncertainty	Some are unsure how to build their portfolio for the right audience—corporate vs. academic vs. freelance.
Learning Curve	Especially for those new to the field, learning portfolio platforms, design tools, and effective presentation takes time.



Level-Up Your Skills

Build Your Skills with Real-World Challenges

If you've ever struggled to choose a topic or create a portfolio-ready sample project, our monthly eLearning challenges take out the guesswork. Each challenge gives you a realistic workplace scenario, a set of clear learning outcomes, and even a style guide for a hypothetical company—so you can focus on solving real problems with real solutions, not just tinkering with authoring tools.

By participating, you'll sharpen your instructional design and development skills, create portfolio-ready samples, and get valuable feedback from peers. Plus, you'll build a library of work that demonstrates your ability to design with purpose, think critically, and adapt to real-world constraints—exactly what hiring managers want to see.

🔗 Dive into the Monthly eLearning Challenges

Chapter Three: Hiring

What Hiring Managers *Actually* Prioritize

How instructional designers are being evaluated, selected, and supported.

Main Takeaway

Hiring practices in the instructional design space continue to emphasize practical, real-world skills over formal credentials or academic backgrounds.

Despite advances in automation, most organizations still rely on human reviewers—not algorithms—to screen resumes. While some interviews include design challenges or project-based tasks, these are not yet standard across the board.

Employers consistently prioritize technical fluency with authoring tools, instructional design know-how, and the ability to communicate clearly and collaborate with stakeholders. Team growth remains steady, with many organizations planning to expand their L&D functions in the near future and few reporting cuts.

Remote opportunities are still available, but hiring plans vary—most companies are maintaining current levels rather than aggressively increasing them.



85% **...of hiring managers still manually review every resume.**

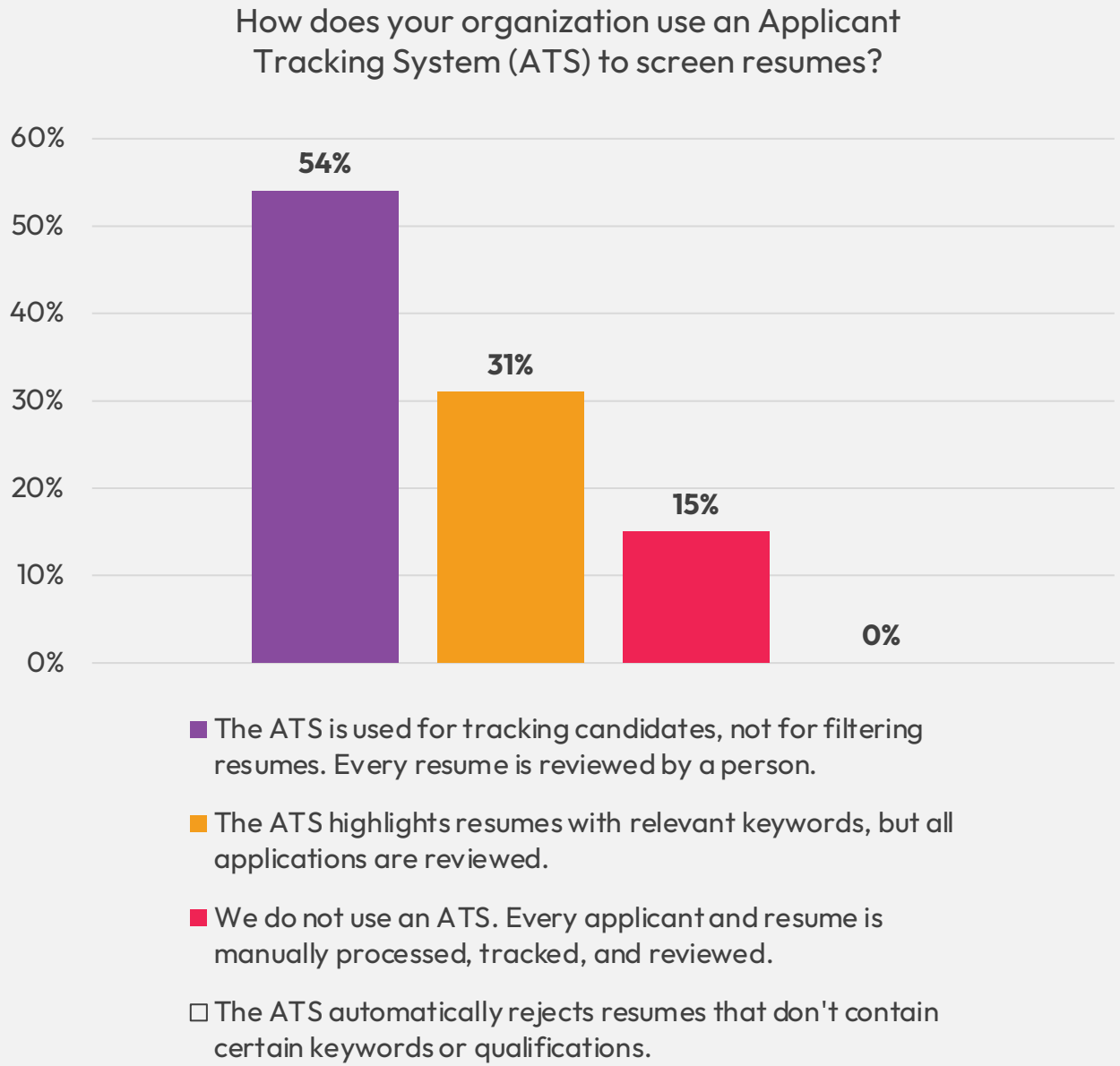
83% **...of L&D teams plan to maintain or grow their instructional design teams over the next 12 months.**

Insight #1

Nobody's letting robots make the call—hiring teams still review every single resume.

When asked how their organization uses an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) to screen resumes, 85% of hiring managers said they still review every application manually—even if an ATS is in place. Another 15% reported not using an ATS at all. Notably, none said they rely on the system to auto-reject candidates based on keywords or qualifications.

This suggests that while ATS tools may be part of the process, they play a minimal role in instructional design hiring. Rather than letting automation filter candidates, most hiring teams take the time to review resumes by hand—a slower approach but one that helps ensure qualified candidates aren't overlooked due to missing buzzwords.



Voices of the Industry

Erin Lewber

Founder &
Executive Coach

Erin Lewber
Coaching

www.erinlewber.com



“As an executive career coach, former recruiting industry leader, and current hiring manager at one of the world's largest tech companies, I've had a front row seat to what's actually happening in the industry for 15+ years. While there's a lot of flashy information out there about the ATS weeding out candidates, AI writing your resume for you, and sneaky ways to game the system with keywords, your most strategic approach to actually landing a job continues to be clarity and consistency. If you were my best friend, here's what I'd tell you, "Humans decide whether you get an interview, not the ATS.

Your mission: Help your reader get to a "Yes" as quickly and simply as possible. How? Read the job postings, understand what they require, clearly and succinctly show you can do those things in your resume. Create a portfolio that shows what you know. Look around online—see what your peers are creating, make sure your portfolio looks as good/better. There are no awards for fancy words, pretty resumes, or silly keyword games. Don't allow online advice written for clicks and likes to take you off course. The job search is hard, no matter what you do, and the classic advice of resume clarity and application consistency still wins every time.”

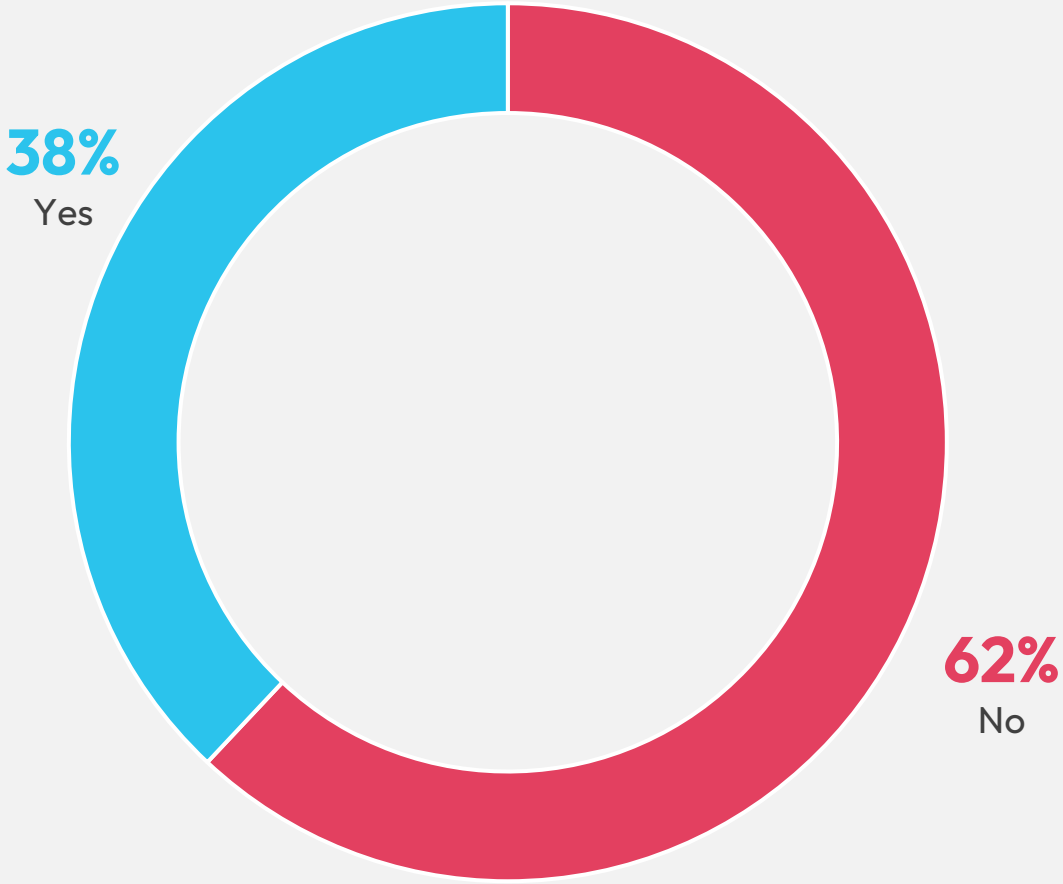
Insight #2

Design challenges aren't a must-have for most hiring teams.

Design challenges—also known as take-home assignments or interview projects—are sometimes used to evaluate a candidate's practical skills during the hiring process. But in the instructional design world, they're not especially common. In fact, 62% of hiring managers say they don't require one at all. Only 38% include a design challenge as part of their interview process.

While these assessments can offer insight into a candidate's approach and capabilities, most organizations still rely on resumes, portfolios, and interviews to make their decisions. The limited use of design challenges may reflect time and resource constraints—or a growing preference for reviewing real-world work samples already showcased in a candidate's portfolio.

As part of your interview process for an instructional designer, do you require candidates to complete a design challenge or interview assignment?



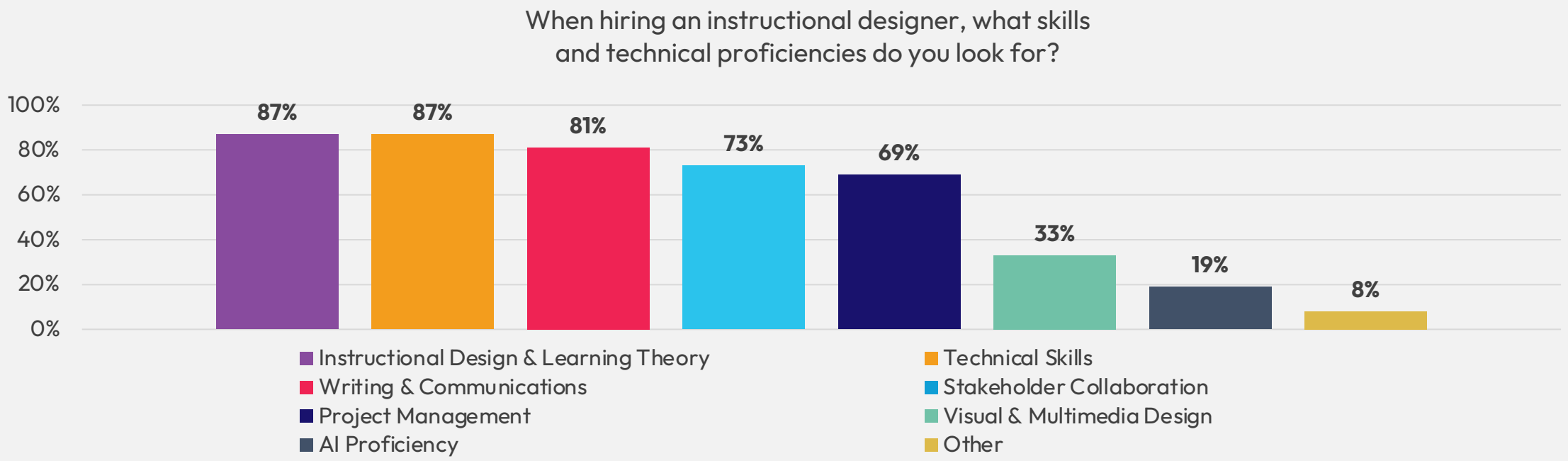
THE ELEARNING DESIGNER'S ACADEMY

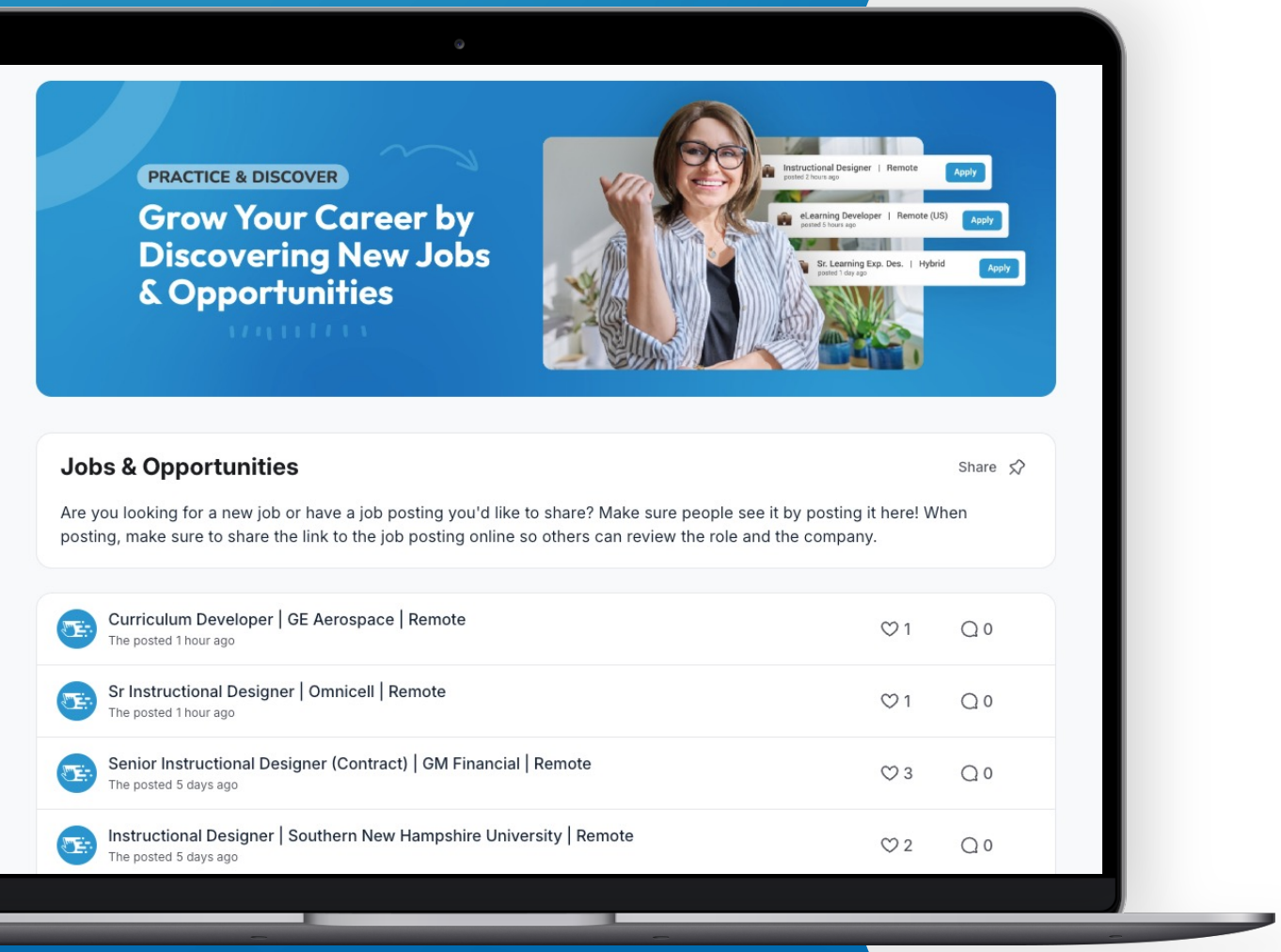
Insight #3

Hiring managers want more than course creators.

Hiring managers are looking for instructional designers with skills that go well beyond course building. Technical proficiency with tools like Articulate Storyline and Adobe Captivate (87%) ranks just as high as instructional design expertise and knowledge of learning science (87%).

Strong writing and communication (81%), stakeholder collaboration (73%), and project management (69%) are also key differentiators. Visual and multimedia design (33%) and AI skills (19%) are less common priorities—for now—but may grow in importance. The clear message: mastering one tool isn't enough—employers want versatile professionals who can design, communicate, and deliver results.





Take the Next Step

Find Your Next ID or eLearning Role

Looking for your next opportunity? Inside our community, the Jobs Board is updated regularly with openings for instructional designers, eLearning developers, and other L&D professionals. You'll find roles from a variety of industries and experience levels—so whether you're just starting out or ready to take the next big step, there's something worth exploring.

Because these listings are curated for our field, you won't have to wade through irrelevant postings or guess whether a job is actually a good fit for your skills. It's a focused, time-saving way to keep your finger on the pulse of hiring in L&D—and you can access it any time as part of your free community membership.

🔗 Browse the Jobs Board

Insight #4

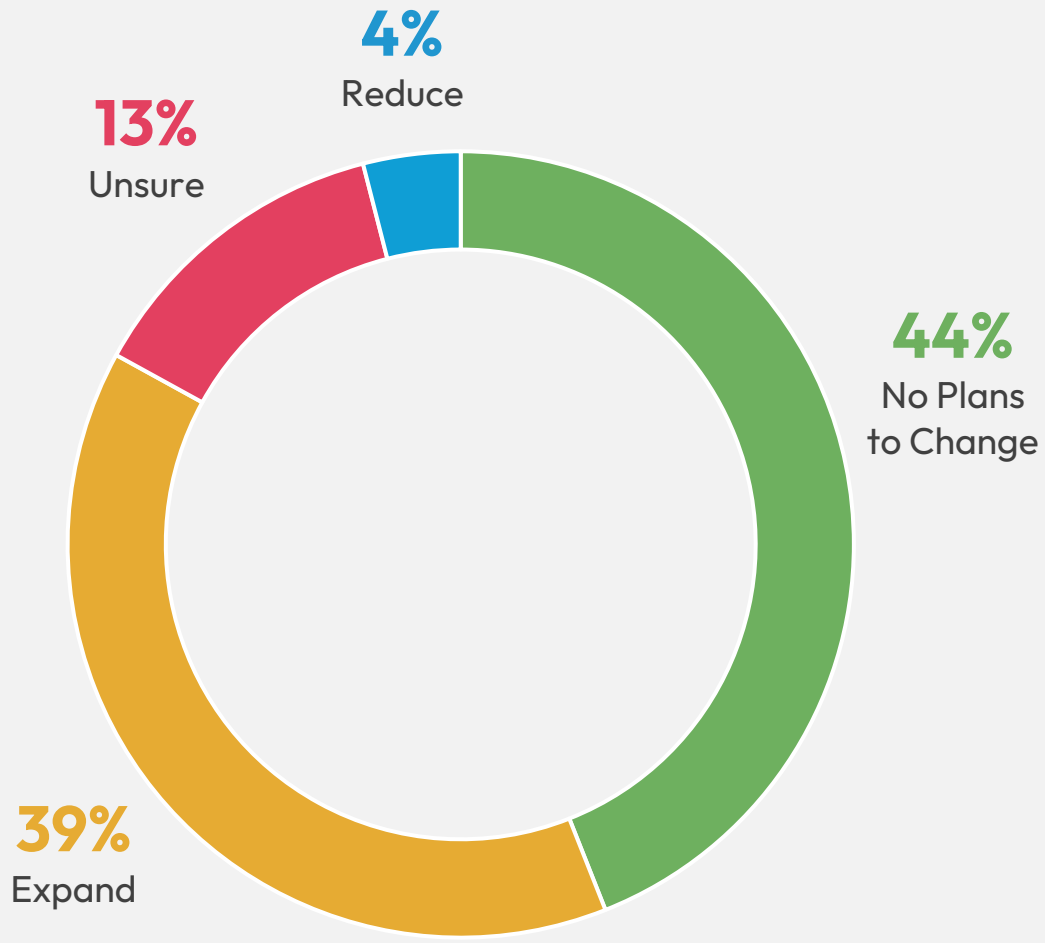
The hiring outlook for instructional designers is strong.

When asked about their plans for team size over the next 12 months, 83% of hiring managers said they expect to either maintain their current number of instructional designers or add new positions. Only 4% anticipate any reduction in head count, and 13% are still unsure.

This level of stability is a positive indicator for the field, especially in a job market where many other roles face uncertainty. For L&D leaders, it suggests sustained investment in learning and development functions as organizations continue to prioritize upskilling, reskilling, and performance support.

For job seekers, it means opportunities are not only holding steady but in many cases are expanding—creating a favorable environment for those looking to enter or advance within the profession.

Do you plan to expand, reduce, or maintain the number of instructional designers on your team over the next 12 months?



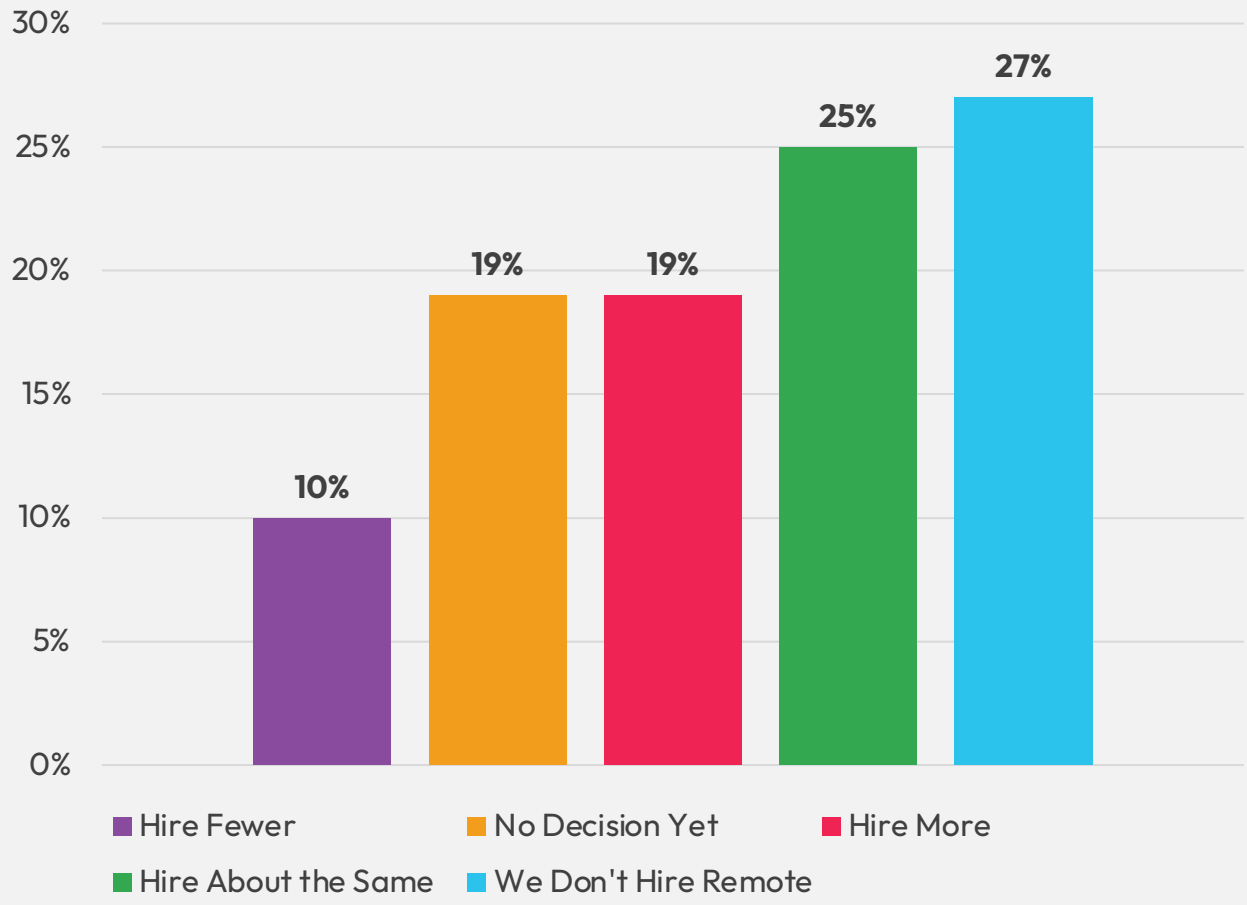
Insight #5

The outlook for remote hiring is anything but consistent.

When asked about their plans for hiring remote instructional designers in the next 12 months, 27% of hiring managers said their organizations don't hire remote IDs at all. Among those that do, the outlook is mixed: 25% expect to hire about the same number, 19% plan to hire more, 10% anticipate hiring fewer, and 19% remain undecided.

Remote work remains part of the instructional design landscape, but signs of growth are modest. This may reflect the rise of hybrid arrangements—blending remote work with on-site collaboration—or a renewed emphasis on building workplace culture through in-person interaction.

How do you anticipate your organization's hiring plans for remote instructional designers changing in the next 12 months?



Find Your Way



Career Truths You Need to Hear

If you've ever questioned your career path, felt stuck in a transition, or battled imposter syndrome, you're not alone—and you don't have to navigate it in silence. In this candid interview, career coach Erin Lewber and I dive into the messy, unpolished realities of career change, confidence, and burnout.

From reframing imposter syndrome to debunking the myth of the "dream job," Erin shares practical insights and a refreshing dose of honesty about showing up authentically in your work life (sweaty armpits and all). Whether you're pivoting roles or simply wondering what's next, this conversation will leave you feeling seen, supported, and ready to move forward with more confidence.

🔗 Watch My Honest Conversation with Erin

Chapter Four: Modalities & Tools

How L&D Teams Design & Deliver Learning

A look at formats, tools, and how teams measure impact.

Main Takeaway

L&D teams are spreading their efforts across multiple modalities, but asynchronous eLearning is the undisputed centerpiece—used by 92% of teams today and topping the list for future investment. Proven, scalable, and learner-friendly, it far outpaces emerging formats like VR/AR and podcasts, which remain in the experimental stage for most organizations. Job aids, how-to videos, and instructor-led formats continue to provide strong support alongside digital courses.

When it comes to building these solutions, the toolset is equally telling: PowerPoint, Word, and Articulate products dominate, with Canva and Adobe tools supporting the creative side. While AI-powered tools are starting to make inroads, adoption is still cautious and exploratory.

Measuring success, however, remains heavily weighted toward learner reactions and knowledge checks, with far fewer teams tracking KPIs or business results—pointing to a major opportunity for L&D to strengthen its alignment with organizational impact.



92% **...of L&D teams create asynchronous eLearning—making it the most widely used modality.**

64% **...of L&D teams plan to increase their use of asynchronous eLearning in the future.**

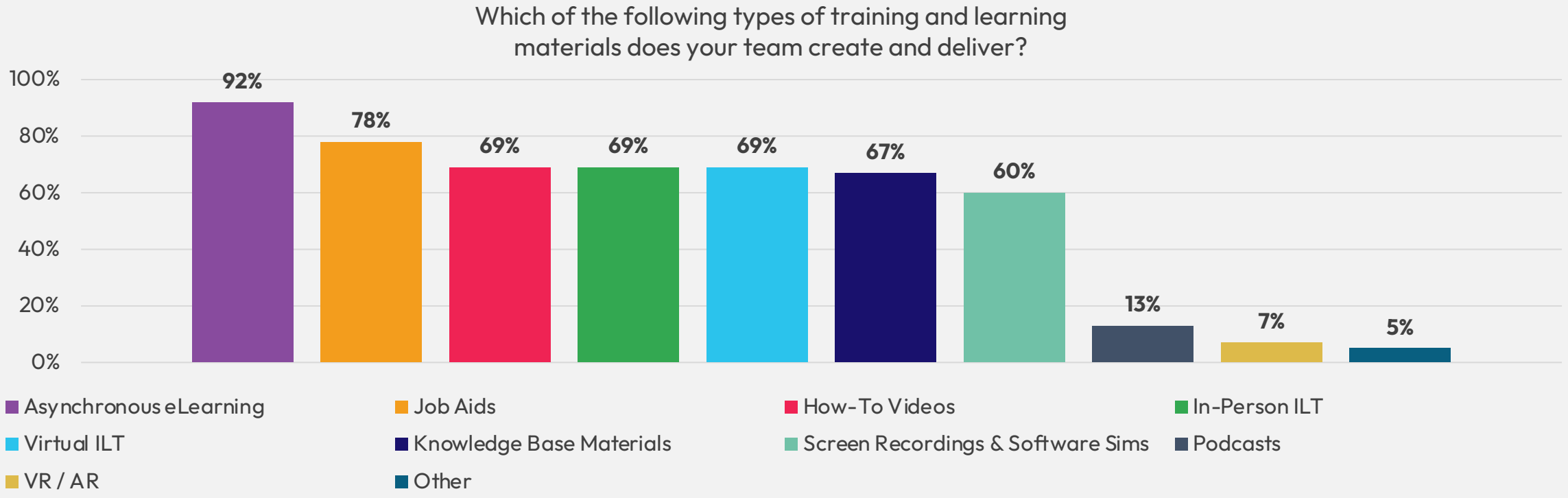
Insight #1

L&D teams create and deliver a diverse mix of materials, but asynchronous eLearning is the go-to for most.

Asynchronous eLearning leads the way, used by 92% of L&D teams, followed by job aids (78%), how-to videos (69%), and ILT/VILT (69% each).

Resource hubs (67%) and software simulations (60%) are also common, while podcasts (13%) and VR/AR (7%) remain niche.

The focus remains on proven, scalable modalities, with emerging formats still in early exploration.



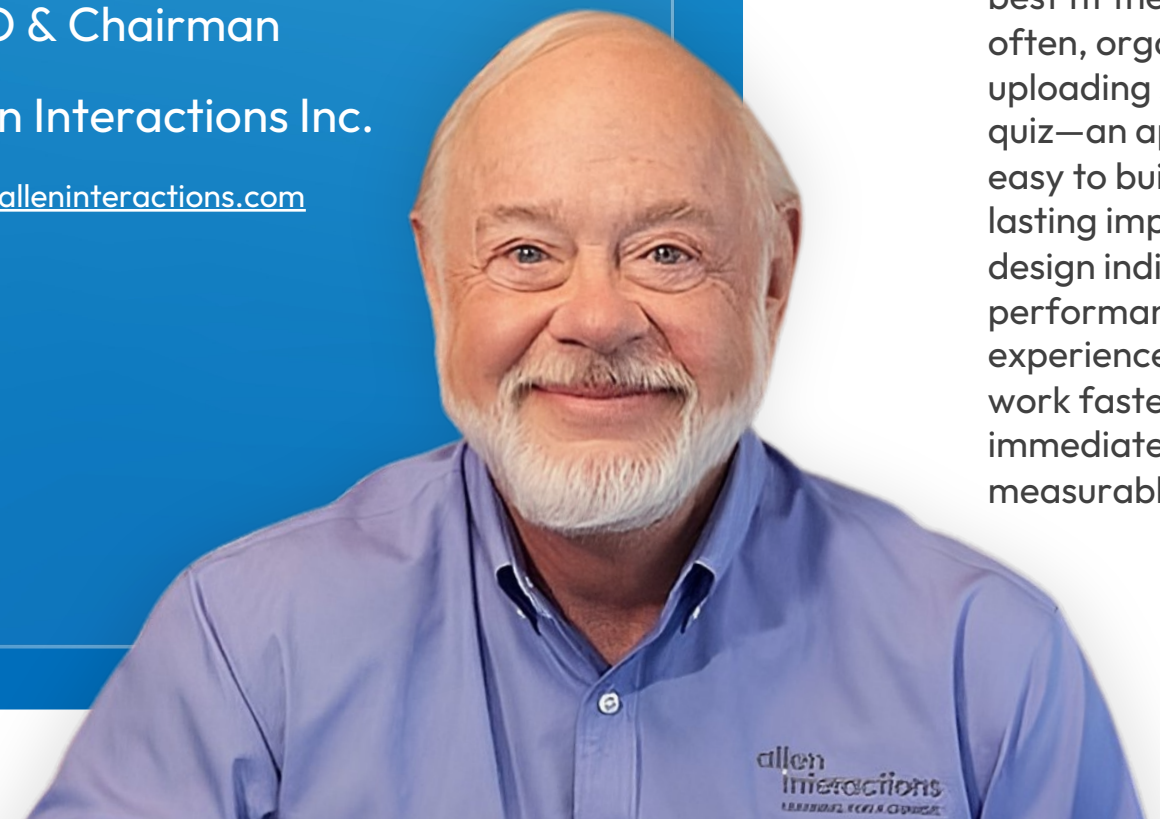
Voices of the Industry

Michael Allen, PhD

CEO & Chairman

Allen Interactions Inc.

www.alleninteractions.com



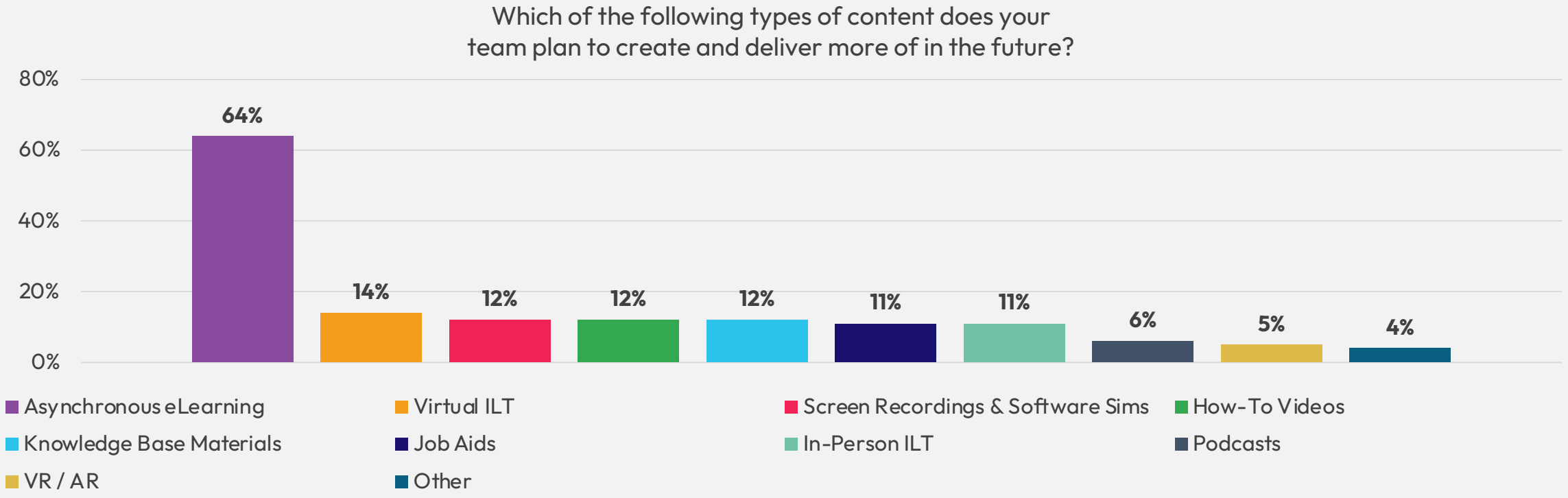
“Asynchronous eLearning remains the preferred training approach because learning is ultimately a personal process. Its anytime, anywhere accessibility allows individuals to engage at their own pace and in ways that best fit their needs. Yet too often, organizations default to uploading slides or videos with a quiz—an approach that may be easy to build but delivers little lasting impact. When we instead design individualized, performance-focused experiences, learners return to work faster with skills they can immediately apply, driving measurable ROI.

The value of asynchronous eLearning will only increase as authoring tools advance, AI capabilities grow, and instructional design principles are applied with greater precision. These developments will enable richer, more adaptive experiences that not only meet diverse learner needs but also deliver consistent performance gains. Done well, asynchronous eLearning will continue to be the first-choice solution for developing skills, improving performance, and achieving strong business results.”

Insight #2

Asynchronous eLearning will remain a top focus in the future.

Looking ahead, 64% of L&D leaders plan to create more asynchronous eLearning—by far the top priority. All other formats trail behind, with virtual ILT at 14%, software simulations, how-to videos, and knowledge base materials at 12% each, and job aids and in-person ILT at 11% each. Podcasts (6%) and VR/AR (5%) remain niche, underscoring a continued focus on scalable, proven approaches that support learner autonomy and digital-first strategies.



Insight #3

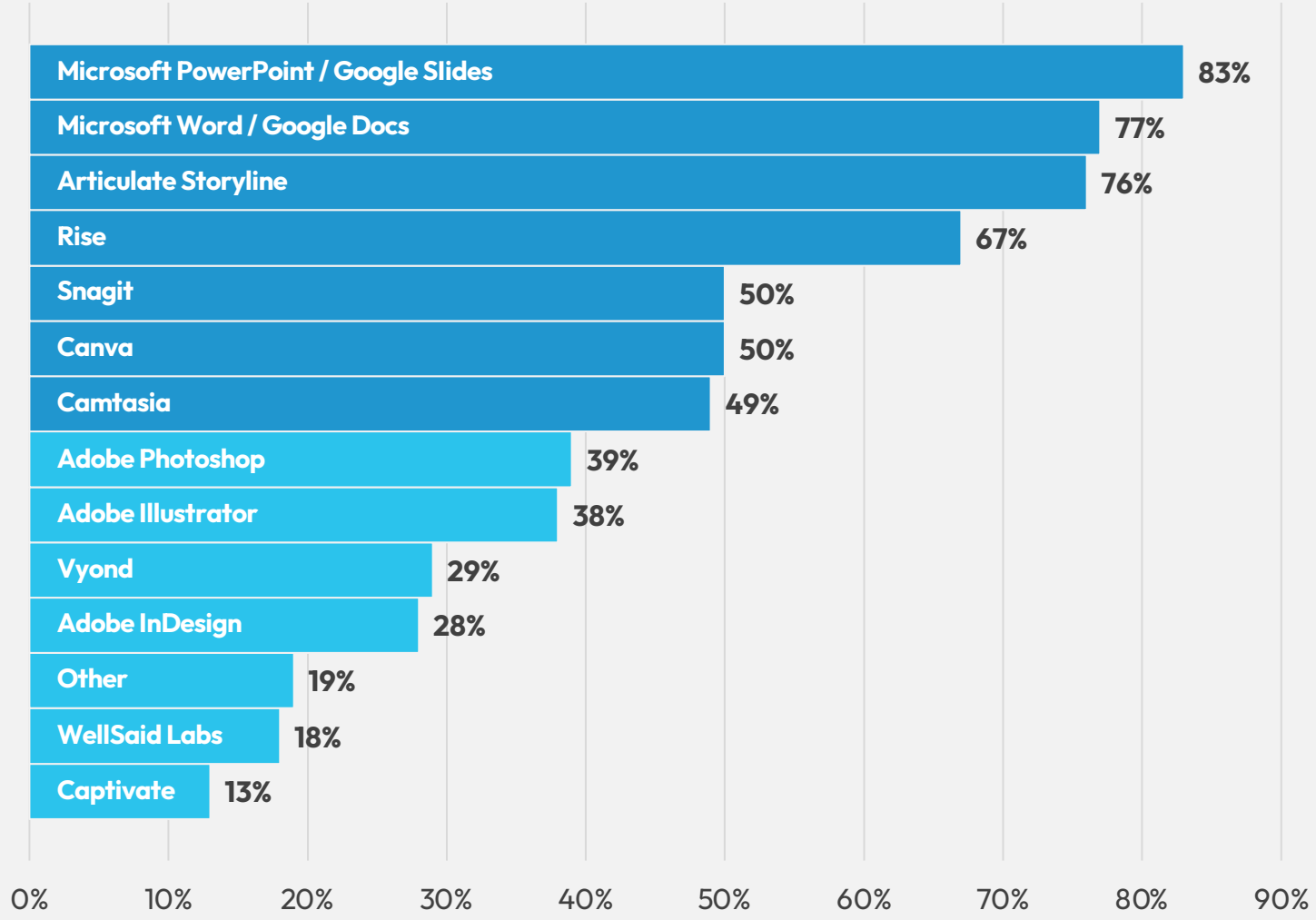
Microsoft and Articulate lead as the go-to authoring tools.

Most L&D professionals lean on familiar core office tools for content creation, with PowerPoint or Google Slides (83%) and Word or Google Docs (77%) leading the list.

Among eLearning authoring tools, Articulate Storyline (76%) and Rise (67%) are the clear front-runners. Visual design and media tools are also widely used, including Snagit (50%), Canva (50%), Camtasia (49%), and Adobe products like Photoshop (39%) and Illustrator (38%).

Adoption of newer AI-powered tools—such as ElevenLabs (10%) and Synthesia (10%)—remains relatively low, indicating that while interest is growing, experimentation with emerging technologies is still in the early stages.

Which authoring tools does your team use to create training or learning solutions?



*Excludes tools with <10% reported usage.



Get Inspired

Real eLearning Projects, Real Inspiration

The best way to grow your skills is to see what's possible. Our eLearning Examples Library is a curated collection of complete projects—from polished courses to detailed storyboards—created by real members of our community. Each example gives you an inside look at the creative process, design decisions, and development techniques that bring effective learning experiences to life.

Whether you're looking for ideas for your next project, inspiration from how others tackle common challenges, or real-world scenarios for building your own portfolio projects, you'll find plenty of inspiration (and practical takeaways) here.

🔗 Explore the eLearning Examples Library

Insight #4

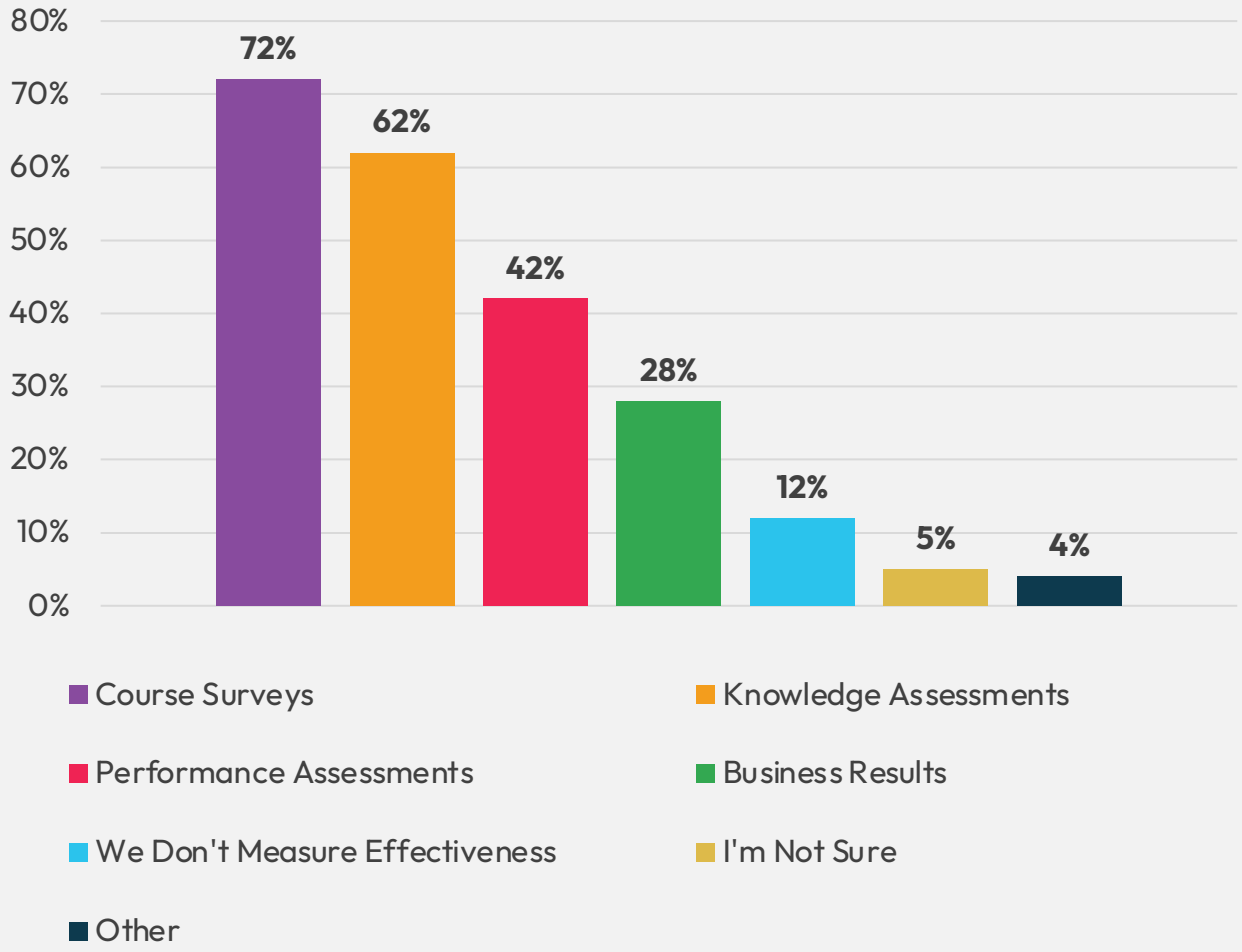
Effectiveness of L&D programs is gauged more by learner feedback than organizational impact.

When it comes to evaluating the effectiveness of L&D programs, most organizations focus on learner feedback and knowledge checks. In our survey, 72% of participants reported using pre- or post-course surveys, while 62% measure knowledge through pre- or post-course assessments. Performance-based measures such as skills assessments or KPIs are less common, used by just 42% of respondents. Only 28% track business results or ROI—highlighting a limited connection between learning initiatives and broader organizational impact.

A notable 12% of respondents said their organization doesn't measure learning effectiveness at all, and 5% were unsure of how it's evaluated.

The relatively low use of ROI and performance metrics points to a significant opportunity for L&D teams to better align their measurement strategies with organizational goals and demonstrate the business value of learning.

How does your team measure the effectiveness of its learning and development programs?



Chapter Five: Artificial Intelligence

Where We Are & Where We're Headed with AI

How teams are using AI today—and what's (really) changing.

Main Takeaway

Artificial Intelligence is beginning to take hold in L&D, but adoption is uneven, and its role is still taking shape. Most professionals are optimistic—either excited about its potential or viewing it as a useful tool—yet concerns remain about ethics, governance, and long-term impact on skills.

Current usage is concentrated in efficiency-driven tasks like brainstorming, content creation, and text-to-speech, with more advanced applications such as personalization and adaptive learning still in early stages. While 77% of organizations have at least informal AI guidelines, others are operating without clear governance. Even existing policies often lag behind the technology's rapid evolution.

For teams not yet using AI, future adoption is uncertain, often due to unclear roadmaps or lack of confidence in its practical application. Importantly, most managers believe AI is unlikely to reduce team size within the next three years, reinforcing its current position as a productivity enhancer rather than a workforce disruptor.



81% **...of respondents use AI for brainstorming and idea generation.**

67% **...of L&D leaders say AI is unlikely to reduce team size in the next 3 years.**

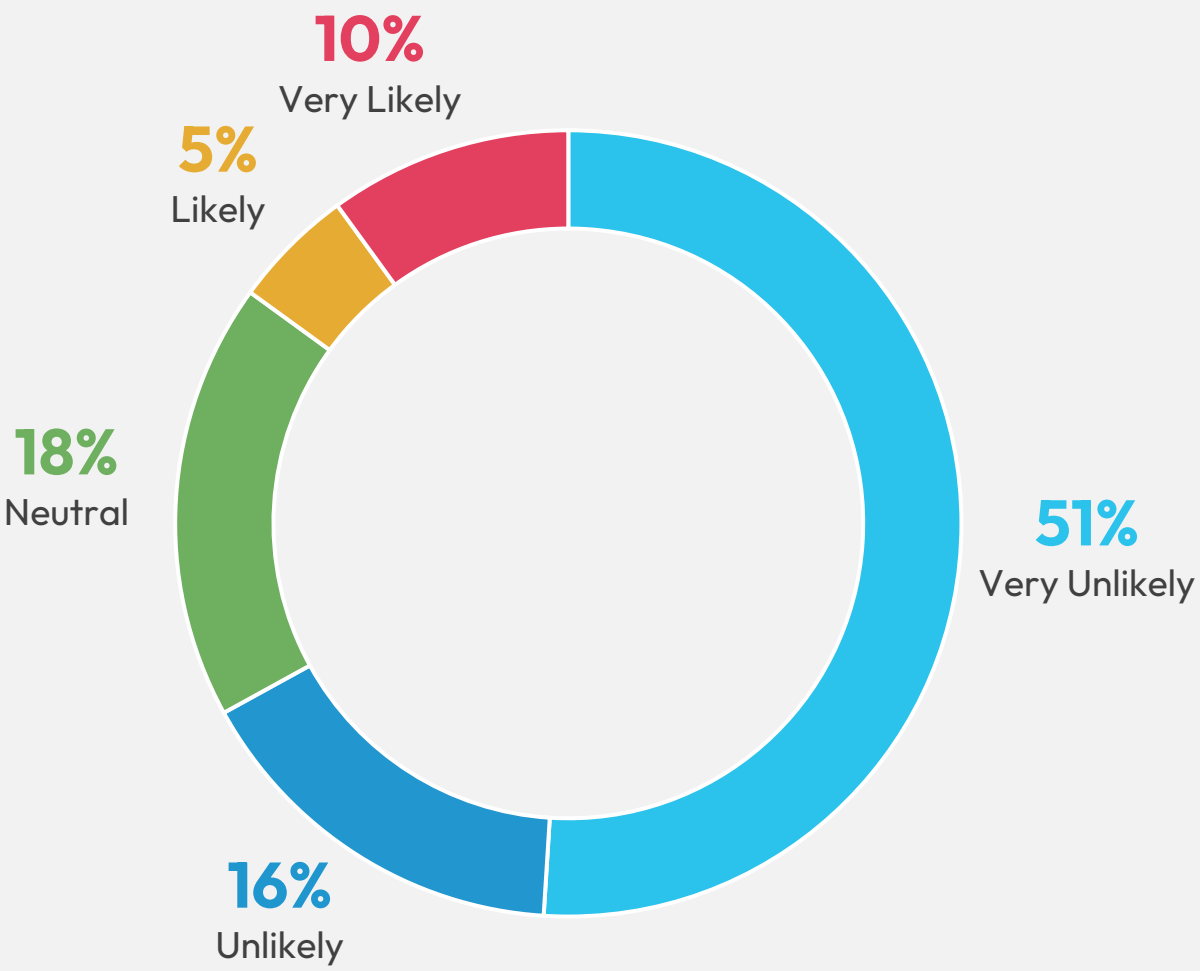
Insight #1

AI is seen as an ally, not a threat, to L&D roles.

When asked about the potential impact of AI on team size over the next three years, most hiring managers expressed little concern about workforce reductions. A combined 67% said it was either very unlikely (51%) or unlikely (16%) that AI would lead to smaller teams. Another 18% remained neutral, while only 15%—split between likely (5%) and very likely (10%)—believe reductions are on the horizon.

This perspective reinforces the current view of AI in L&D as a productivity enhancer rather than a job eliminator. While AI is increasingly embedded into workflows—especially for content creation and efficiency gains—its role appears to be augmenting human capabilities rather than replacing them. However, the 18% neutral response suggests some uncertainty, hinting that future technological advancements or organizational shifts could change sentiment over time. For now, most leaders seem to see AI as a tool to help teams work smarter, not smaller.

In your opinion, how likely is it that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will reduce the size of your team within the next 3 years?



Voices of the Industry

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"According to the 2025 State of the L&D Industry Report, 37% of L&D professionals see AI as useful but overhyped—a sign the promise is there, but the proof is still catching up. Many are starting with AI for brainstorming, which is a good first step, but the real potential comes when we move beyond idea generation. Imagine AI auto-filling templates, powering adaptive role-play simulations tailored to a learner's role and goals, or analyzing interaction data from tools like ChatGPT to uncover skill gaps and trigger targeted resources. Sharing success stories like these can help shift AI from a novelty to a trusted part of the L&D toolkit—and close the gap for those still on the sidelines.

The data shows AI adoption in L&D is still in its early stages. Now is the time for L&D leaders to insert themselves into the business and lead with AI—automating repetitive tasks for their teams, delivering adaptive learning experiences, and using data to pinpoint where skills need to grow—before other teams do it without us and without the foundation of learning science. That is how we prevent "learning" solutions that miss the mark on engagement and real-world impact. In the years ahead, our value will be in designing the systems that guide AI: shaping how feedback is delivered, how timing supports retention, and how learning meets people in the moment they need it."

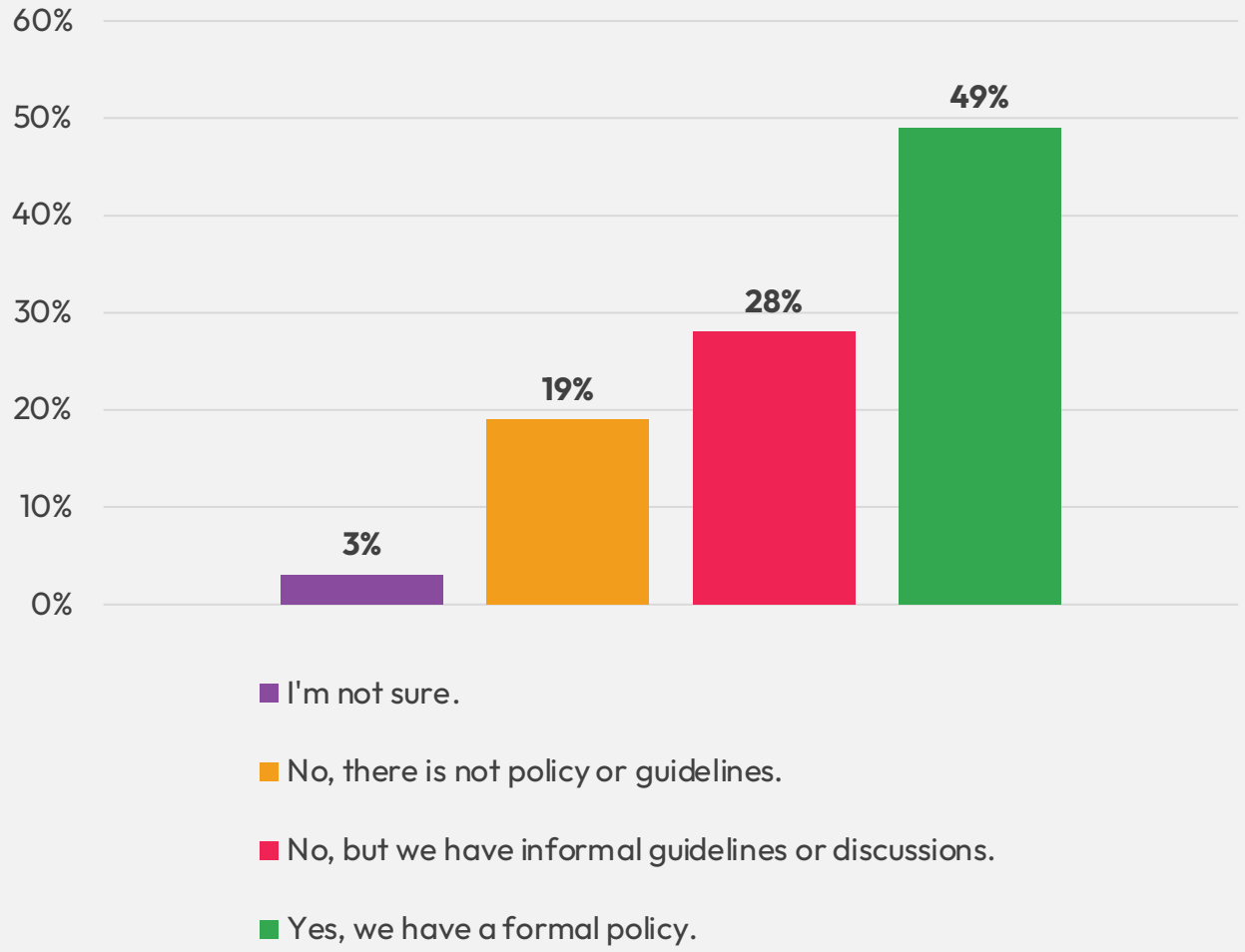
Insight #2

AI governance is taking shape.

77% of participants say their organization has either a formal policy or informal guidelines for AI use, while 19% have no policy at all. A small percentage are unsure—suggesting communication gaps may exist even where policies are in place.

While many teams operate with some level of AI governance, others are still navigating gray areas. AI holds tremendous potential for L&D, but without clear guidelines, the risks can quickly outweigh the benefits. And governance isn't a one-time task—policies must evolve in step with the technology to remain relevant and effective.

Does your organization have an officially documented policy or guidelines for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in your work?

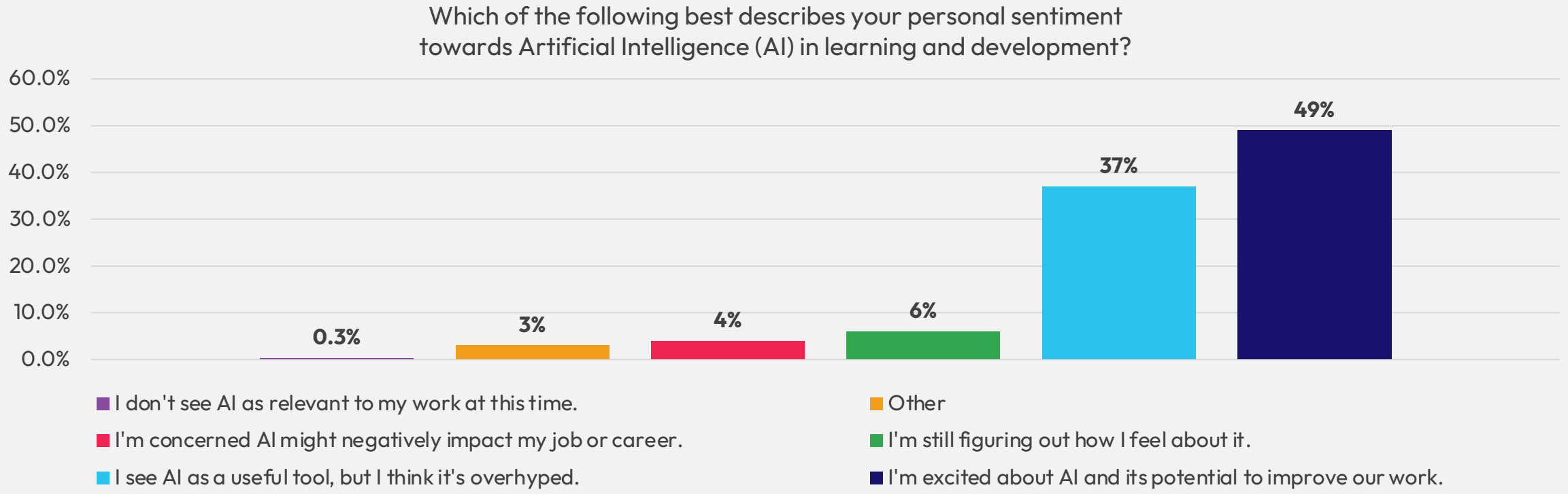


Insight #3

Most are optimistic about AI.

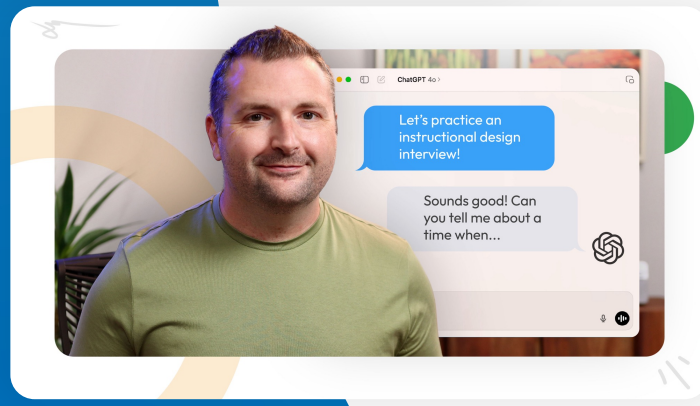
Personal sentiment toward AI in L&D skews positive—49% of participants are excited about its potential, and 37% see it as useful but somewhat overhyped. A smaller share feel neutral (6%) or express concern about negative career impacts (4%). Almost no one (0.3%) dismisses AI as irrelevant.

While optimism is high, there's still a portion of the field taking a wait-and-see approach. Moving more professionals from curiosity to confidence will require sharing real success stories and providing clear, practical guidance that turns AI's promise into proven value.









Work Smarter

Practical AI Tips for Instructional Designers

AI isn't just a buzzword—it's a powerful tool that can help you design, develop, and deliver learning experiences faster and more effectively.

In this curated playlist, you'll find step-by-step videos showing exactly how to put AI to work in your instructional design and eLearning development process. From generating ideas and writing scenarios to streamlining workflows and prototyping courses, each video focuses on practical, real-world applications you can start using right away—no hype, no fluff.

🔗 Watch this Growing Playlist of AI for ID Videos

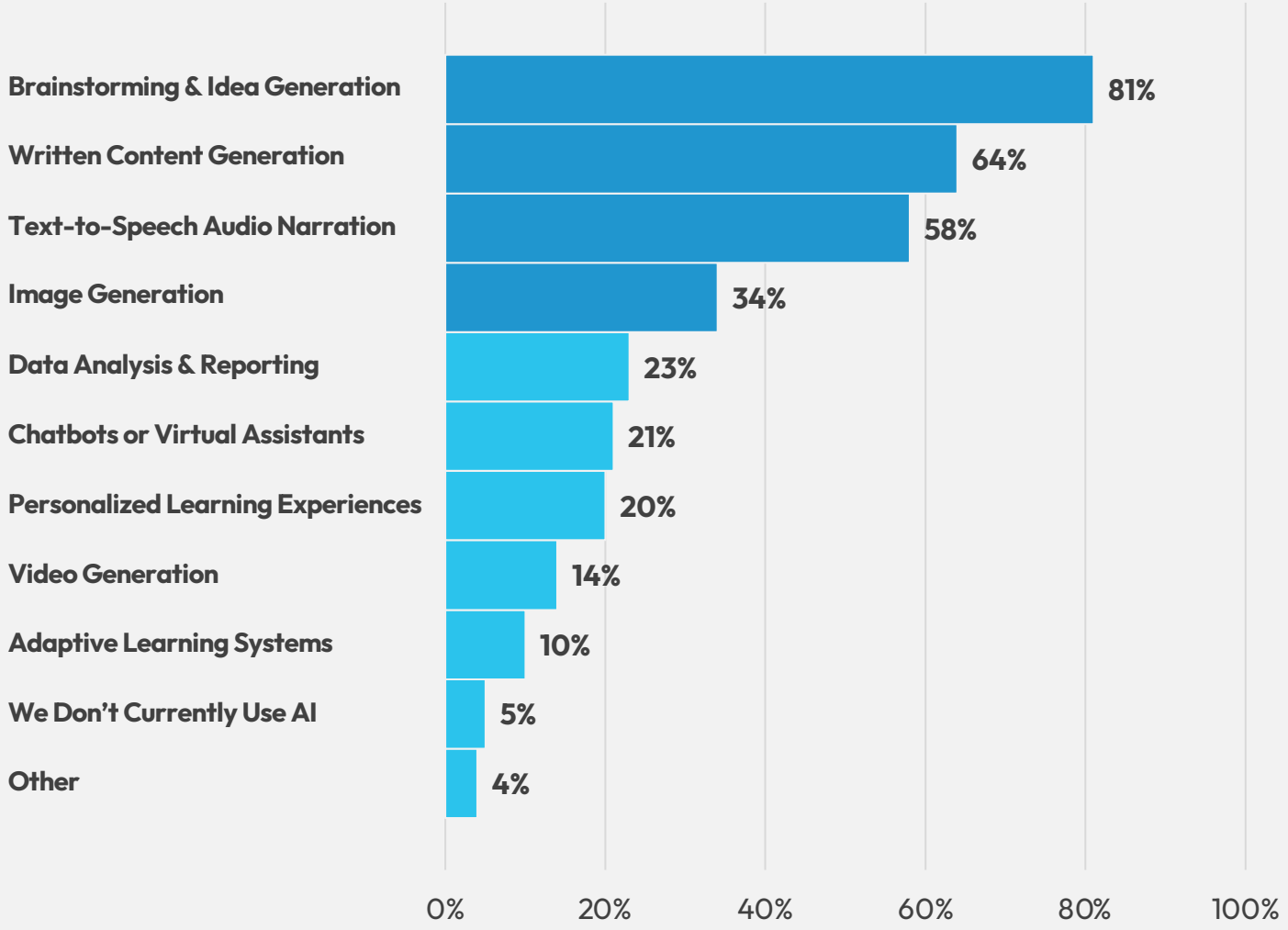
Insight #4

Use of AI centers on content ideation and creation.

The most common applications are brainstorming and idea generation (81%), written content creation (64%), and text-to-speech narration (58%). Only 5% of respondents say they aren't using AI at all.

This pattern shows AI's current value as a speed and efficiency tool—but the greater opportunity lies beyond production. Leveraging AI for personalization and adaptive learning could unlock deeper engagement and more impactful learning experiences.

How do you use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in your role?



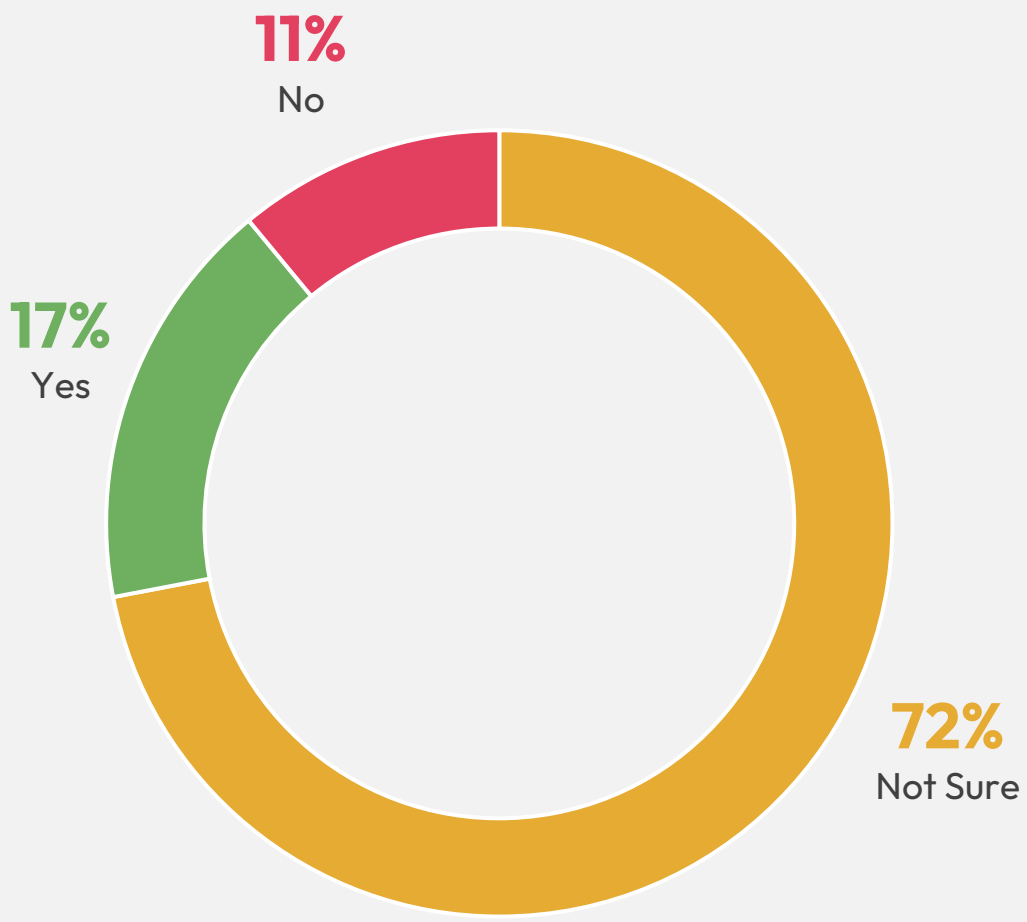
Insight #5

Future AI adoption remains uncertain for the majority of non-users.

Among participants who aren't currently using AI, the majority remain on the fence about future adoption. 72% say they are unsure whether they will begin using AI in the next 12 months, while 17% plan to adopt it and 11% say they will not. This high level of uncertainty signals that while curiosity and interest exist, many L&D professionals are still unclear on where AI fits within their workflows or how it could deliver tangible value.

For some, hesitation may stem from a lack of clear guidance, best practices, or success stories that demonstrate AI's practical benefits in L&D. Others may be waiting for organizational policies, governance structures, or the technology itself to mature before committing resources. Until those barriers are addressed, adoption among this group is likely to remain slow, even as AI continues to expand its footprint across the industry.

Do you plan to start using Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the next 12 months?



Conclusion

What This All Means for *You*

Key reflections, closing insights, and how to turn this data into action—for your career, your team, or your next move.

Turning Insights into Action

The 2025 State of the L&D Industry Report offers a clear-eyed view of where the field stands today, where it's headed, and how professionals can position themselves for long-term success in instructional design and learning & development. This year's findings affirm some long-standing truths—such as the enduring value of strong portfolios, core design skills, and the ability to adapt content for diverse learners—while also spotlighting emerging shifts in technology, hiring practices, and the ways organizations measure the true impact of learning initiatives.

Beyond the numbers, the report paints a picture of a field in motion. AI and automation are creating new opportunities while reshaping workflows, remote and hybrid work are now firmly entrenched, and the demand for visible, demonstrable skills continues to rise. The takeaway is clear: Technical know-how is important, but visibility, adaptability, and a strategic mindset are becoming just as essential.

Whether you're an early-career professional taking your first steps, a mid-career designer seeking advancement, or a senior leader charting your team's direction, the data points to tangible actions you can take today. From building a portfolio that actively opens doors to cultivating a professional presence that gets noticed and embracing AI with both curiosity and discernment, these insights go beyond observation—they offer a roadmap for relevance and growth in a competitive, evolving landscape.

The future of L&D will belong to those who not only keep pace with change but also shape it. Use these findings as both a benchmark and a springboard—an opportunity to refine your skills, rethink your strategies, and take deliberate steps toward the career and impact you want to create.

Turning Insights into Action

Here are six key takeaways to help you navigate and grow your L&D career in 2025 and beyond...

1

Know Your Value & Negotiate It

With a median salary of $88K and most professionals reporting raises in the past year, L&D offers room for upward mobility—especially with more experience, leadership responsibility, and work in higher-paying industries. Track your achievements and use data to negotiate with confidence.

2

Make Your Portfolio a Living Asset for Your Career

Portfolios aren't just a hiring formality—they're a differentiator. Go beyond polished deliverables to showcase your process, context, and results. Treat your portfolio as a career-long tool, updating it regularly, not just when job hunting.

3

Build Skills Hiring Managers Really Want

Employers prioritize instructional design expertise, technical authoring skills, and strong communication over formal credentials. Combining design thinking, technical proficiency, and stakeholder management will help you stand out.

Turning Insights into Action

4

Focus on Proven Formats—While Exploring New Ones

Asynchronous eLearning remains the core of most L&D strategies, but blended approaches with job aids, instructor-led training, and video are still in demand. Keep an eye on VR/AR, podcasts, and other emerging tools, but anchor your skills in the formats with lasting demand.

5

Measure What Really Matters to Your Org

Most teams still rely on surveys and knowledge checks, but few measure ROI or business impact. Building skills in connecting learning outcomes to organizational results can boost your credibility and open leadership opportunities.

6

Approach AI with Curiosity & Intentionality

AI is gaining traction for brainstorming, writing, and media creation, but adoption is uneven and governance is still evolving. Experiment, stay informed, and develop ethical practices that enhance your work rather than replace core skills.

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