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HR Pulse Survey 2024

Introduction

Each year, the HR Pulse Survey, a collaboration between PwC Malta and the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD), explores the HR challenges and aspirations of local organisations. As global workplace dynamics shift, this year's tenth edition of the survey focuses on the insights of Malta's HR professionals and top executives regarding talent management and learning technology, along with current priorities and challenges.

Learning and Development (L&D) is a crucial component of most organisational and HR strategies, varying in intensity based on the organisation's size and needs. This is seen as critical for organisations to achieve their strategic goals and priorities, because it equips employees with the necessary skills and knowledge, increases productivity, fosters innovation and adaptability, and ensures a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving business environment. In this regard, the learning and skills landscape is changing and has become more important than ever. More than 70% of employees in the 2024 PwC Hopes & Fear survey who have used Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) agree that this will create opportunities to learn new skills at work. The same survey found that almost half of employees say that having opportunities to learn new skills is a key consideration when it comes to their decision to stay with their employer or leave for another job.

This necessitates collaboration between HR and L&D professionals to ensure effective outcomes and the efficient operations of all functions. HR and L&D work together on various aspects such as onboarding, talent development, and succession planning.

The survey was completed by employers (HR, L&D and organisational leadership) together with other members from the local HR community. The survey comprehensively explored several critical areas, asking respondents to evaluate various statements regarding their current organisational context. These areas included:

- Present state of L&D in organisations
- Current L&D trends
- Delivery methods of L&D
- Engaging training programmes
- Benefits of investing in L&D activities
- Challenges of L&D
- Skills assessments
- Preferred talent management offerings
- Succession planning
- People-related concerns

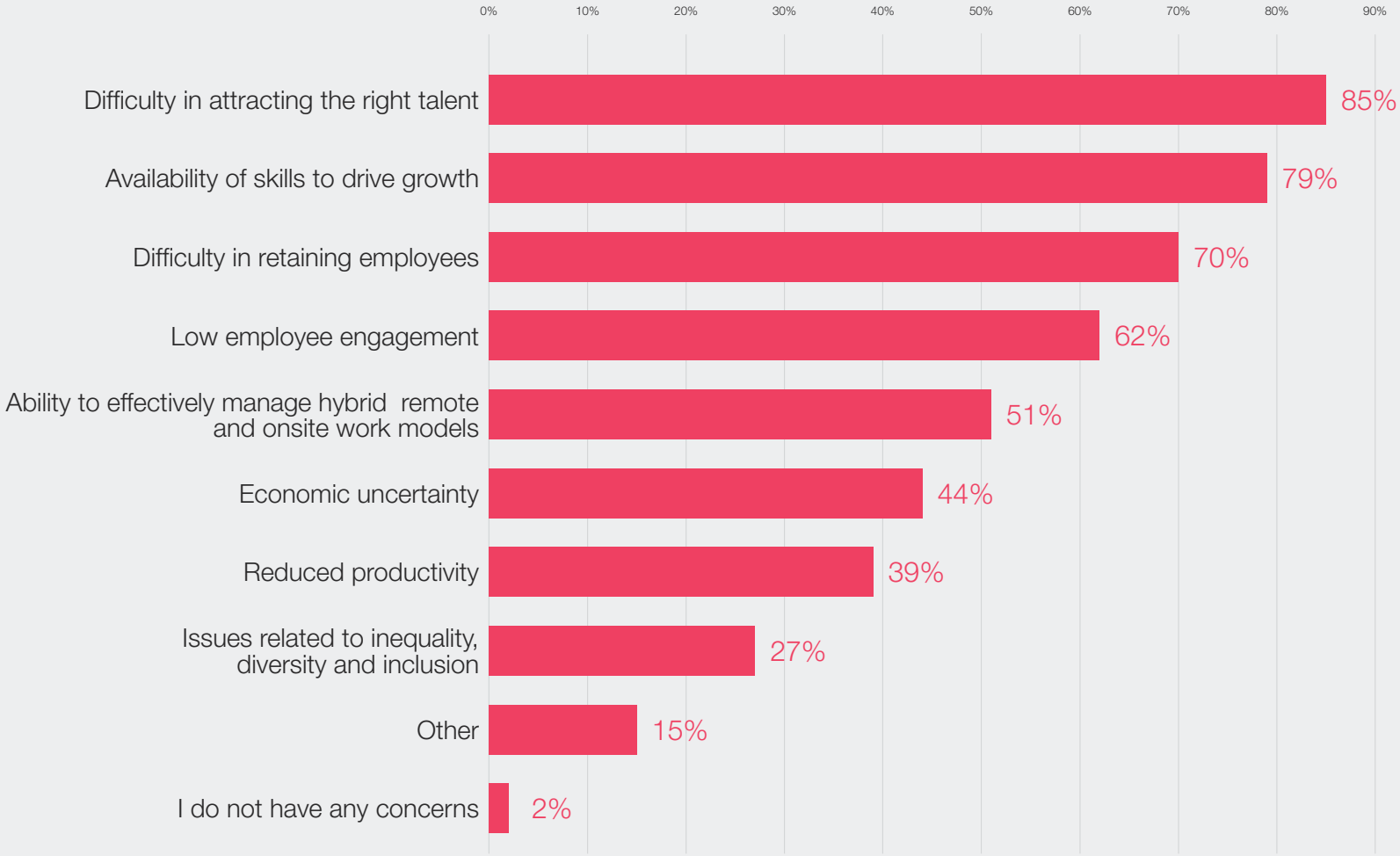
The findings offer a perspective on the current trends in Malta's workforce ecosystem. They provide valuable insights to help organisations navigate today's complexities and strategically plan for the future.

People-related Concerns

Participants were asked to select their top five people-related concerns at present. Difficulty in attracting the right talent was the most popular choice (85%), followed by availability of skills to drive growth (79%), and difficulty in retaining employees (70%). These concerns directly impact organisational performance, innovation, and competitiveness in a competitive global market. The top 2 concerns shed light on the critical importance of L&D for organisations to meet talent and skills demands of their operations. Organisations are turning to L&D to tackle challenges in attracting the right talent, retaining them and ensuring that they have the capabilities to drive growth.

Conversely, issues related to inequality, diversity, and inclusion (27%) was the least popular choice. This may not be perceived as a top concern for some organisations because they are prioritising immediate challenges such as talent acquisition, skills shortages, and employee retention to sustain growth and operational efficiency.

What are your top people-related concerns at the moment?

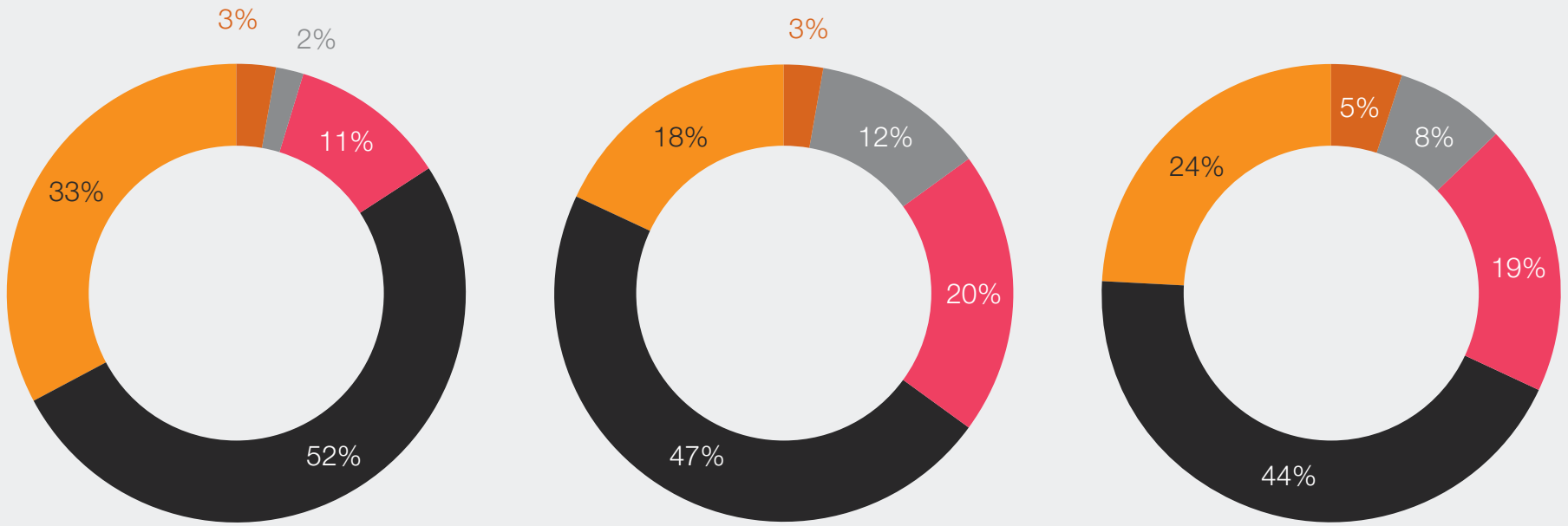


Present State of L&D in Organisations

In total, 85% (33% strongly agree and 52% agree) of respondents agree that Learning & Development in their organisation contributes to the achievement of strategic goals and priorities, while 5% disagreed (3% strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed). This illustrates the recognised importance of L&D equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to drive performance and innovation, ensuring they are aligned with the organisation's objectives.

68% (24% strongly agreed and 44% agreed) of respondents believe that their organisation has an effective learning culture, while 13% (5% strongly disagreed and 8% disagreed) in total disagree with this statement. Furthermore, 65% (18% strongly agreed and 47% agreed) of participants stated that the leaders and managers in their organisation have the right skills and tools to build a learning culture, while 15% (3% strongly disagreed and 12% disagreed) disagree with this statement. This may represent organisations that, at present, are facing inadequate investment in training resources and a lack of prioritisation of continuous professional development.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your organisation

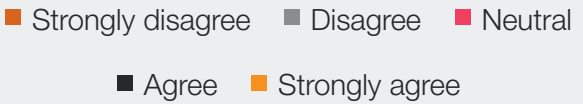


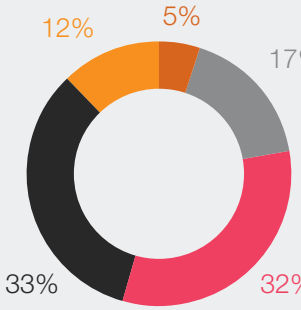
Learning & Development in my organisation contributes to the achievement of our strategic goals and priorities.

Leaders and managers in my organisation have the right skills and tools to build a learning culture.

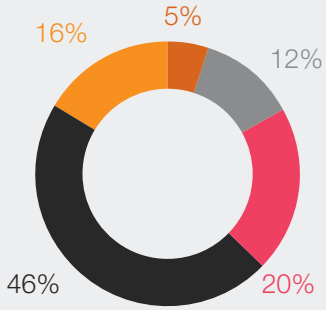
My organisation has an effective learning culture.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your organisation's present learning & development?

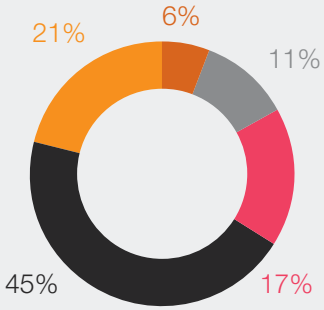




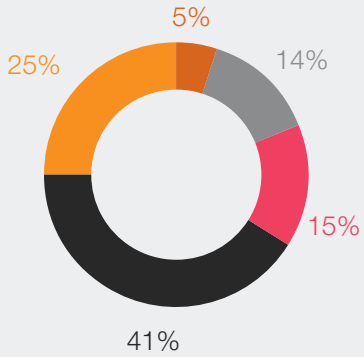
Our learning and development is based on a competency framework / skills taxonomy.



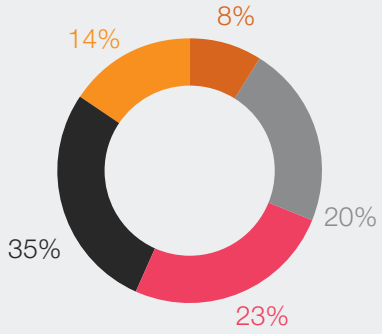
Our learning and development at an organisational and departmental level is based on a training needs assessment.



Our learning and development set-up offers the opportunity for personalised learning plans.



Our learning and development structure allows for learning remotely and on-the-go in the learners own preferred time.



Our learning and development approach is technology enabled e.g. by eLearning, Learning Management Systems, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Generative AI.

In terms of their organisation's present state, the responses shed light on organisations that have L&D practices in place. The following questions were surveyed in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey and surveyed once again in 2024 for comparison purposes. The results show that learning that allows for on-the-go learning is being given increased focus, which may signify that organisations are shifting their focus more towards flexible learning.

45% of participants agreed that their learning and development is based on a competency framework / skills taxonomy, which refers to a structured framework outlining the essential skills, behaviours, and knowledge required for effective performance (61% agreed with this statement in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey). 22% of the participants disagreed with this statement, while 32% were neutral.

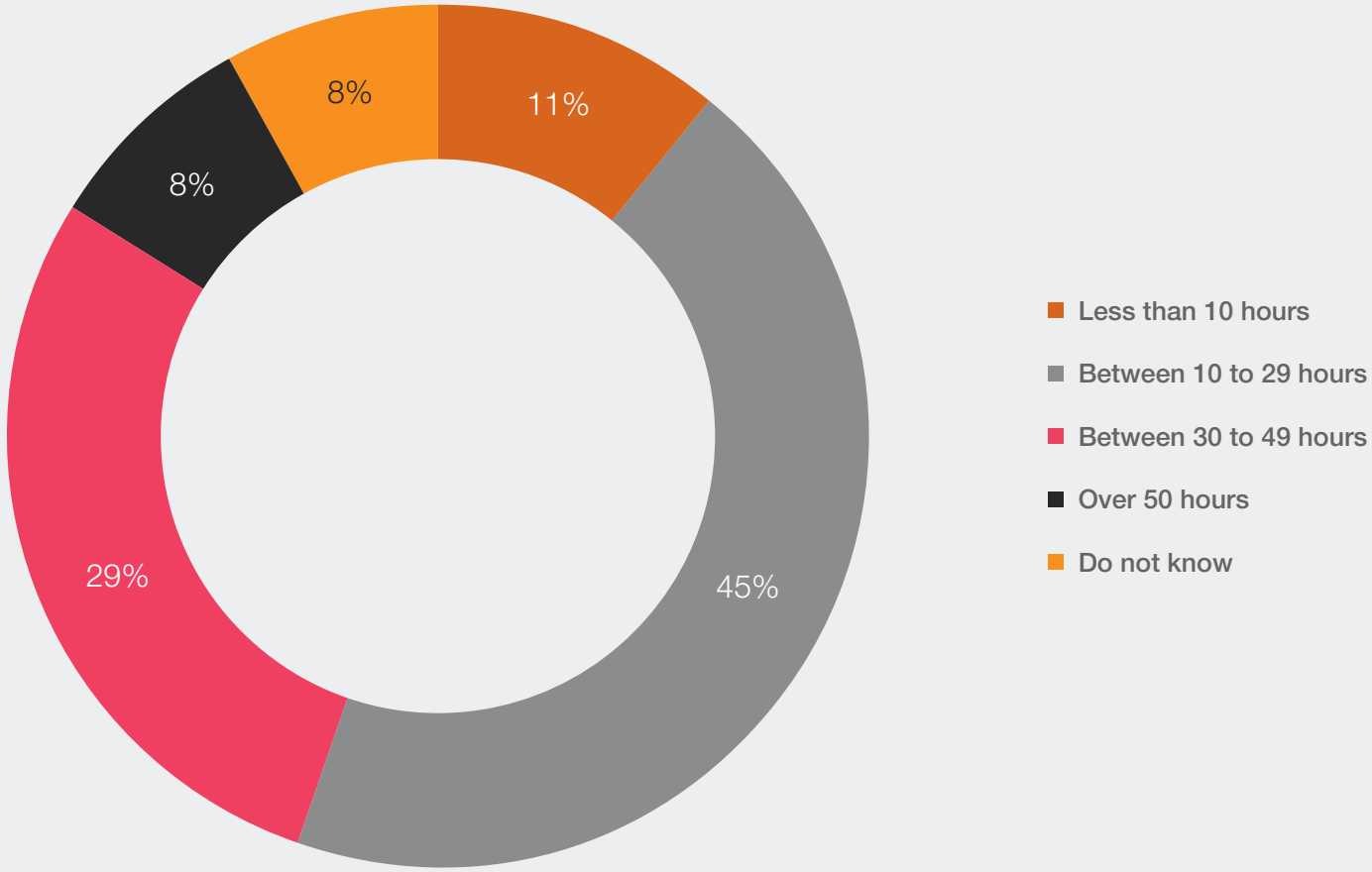
62% of respondents agreed that their learning and development at an organisational and departmental level is based on a training needs assessment (74% agreed with this statement in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey), which identifies the gaps between current skills and knowledge of employees and the competencies required to meet goals. 17% of participants disagreed with this statement, while 20% were neutral.

66% of participants in total agreed that their learning and development set-up offers the opportunity for personalised learning plans (70% agreed with this statement in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey), which would be designed to meet the unique training and development needs of employees. Personalised learning plans would include targeted training programmes, resources, and support systems. 17% of participants disagreed with this statement, while 17% were neutral.

66% of respondents in total agreed that their learning and development structure allows for learning remotely and on-the-go in the learner's own preferred time (61% agreed with this statement in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey). 19% of participants disagreed with this statement, while 15% were neutral.

49% of participants agreed that their learning and development approach is technology enabled e.g. by eLearning, Learning Management Systems, Virtual and Augmented Reality, GenAI. 28% of participants disagreed with this statement, while 23% were neutral. (52% agreed with this statement in the 2023 HR Pulse Survey.

On average, how many hours per year do employees within your organisation spend on learning and development?



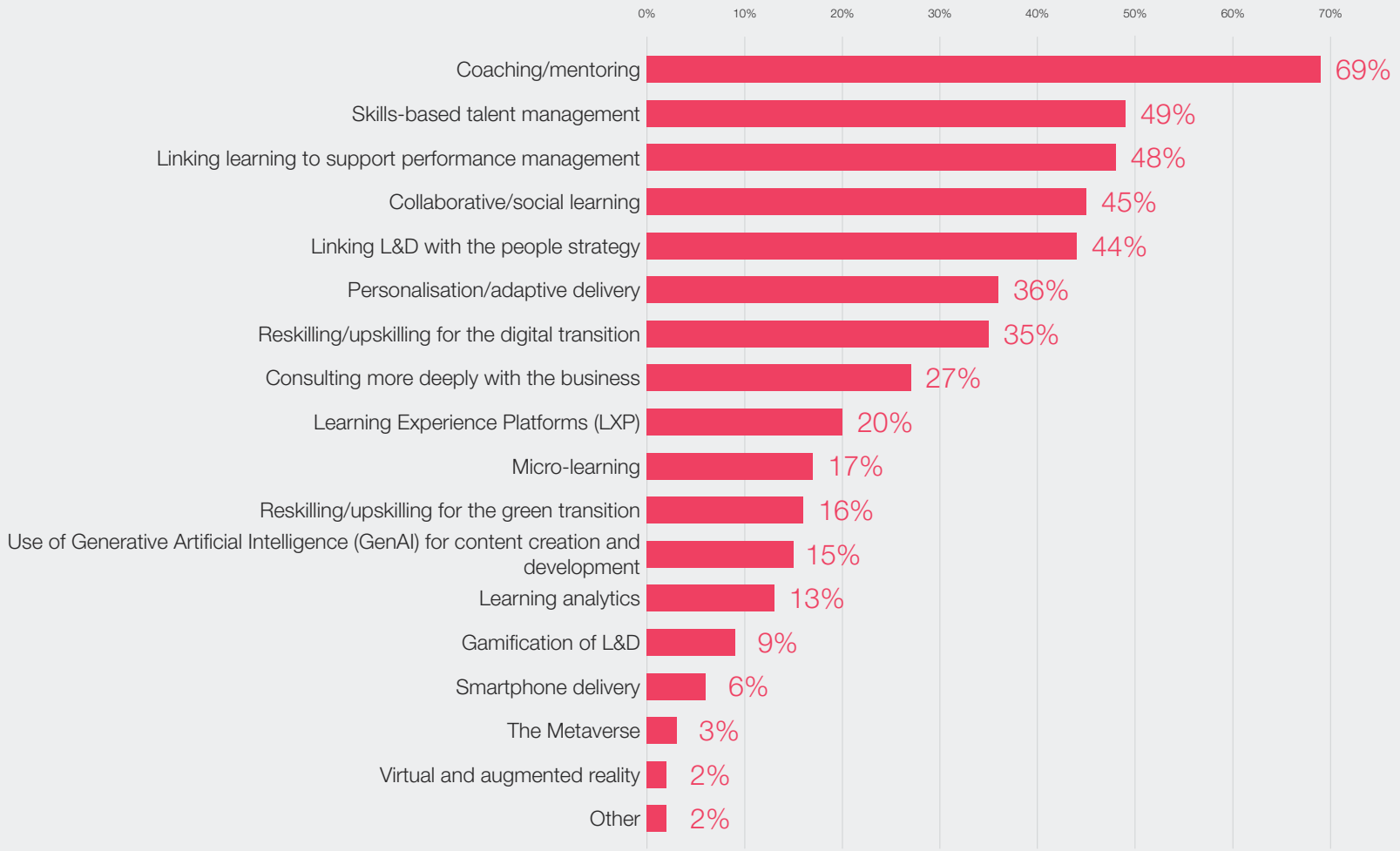
Nearly half (45%) of participants responded that employees within their organisation spend between 10 to 29 hours per year, on average, on L&D. This implies that the majority of participants work in organisations where employees spend between 1 to 2 hours per month, on average, on L&D. This can be seen as quite low when considering that 85% have stated that L&D contributes to the achievement of strategic goals. Furthermore, in the context of emerging technology rapidly impacting ways of working and other factors pushing the need for constant upskilling, organisations appear to be investing minimal time in staff training.

A further 29% of participants indicated that employees spent approximately between 30 to 49 hours per year on L&D, while 11% responded that their employees spend less than 10 hours per year on L&D. Only 8% are investing over 50 hours per week, equating to roughly half a day of training per month.

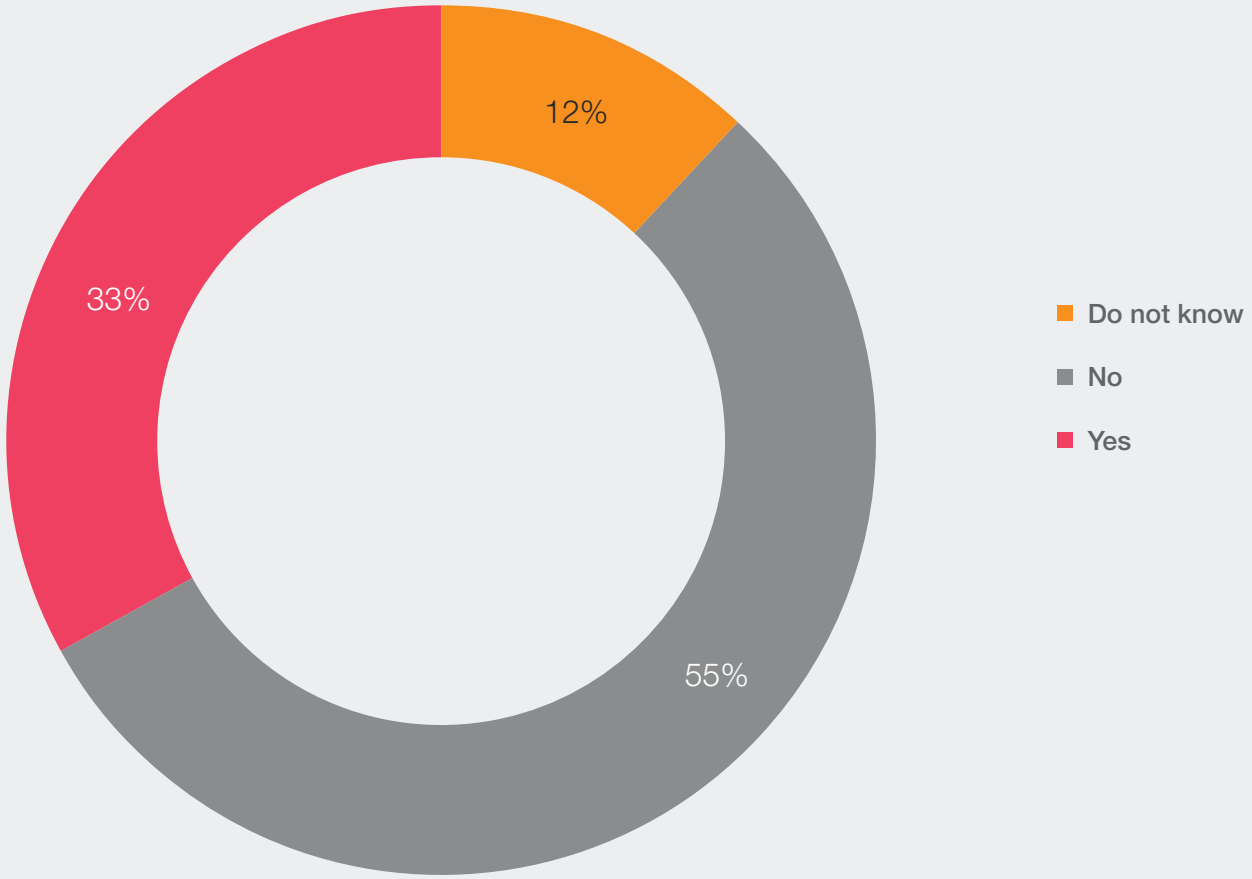
Current L&D Trends

Coaching and mentoring was selected by 69% of the participants as the most popular L&D trend that they are actively integrating within their organisation, showing a strong preference for personalised approaches. This was followed by skills-based talent management (49%), integrating learning to enhance performance management (48%), collaborative and social learning (45%), and aligning L&D with the people strategy (44%). On the other hand, the gamification of L&D (9%), smartphone delivery (6%), the Metaverse (3%), and virtual and augmented reality (2%) were the least commonly implemented, suggesting these technologies have not yet gained widespread traction in L&D strategies.

Which of the following L&D trends are you actively integrating within your organisation?



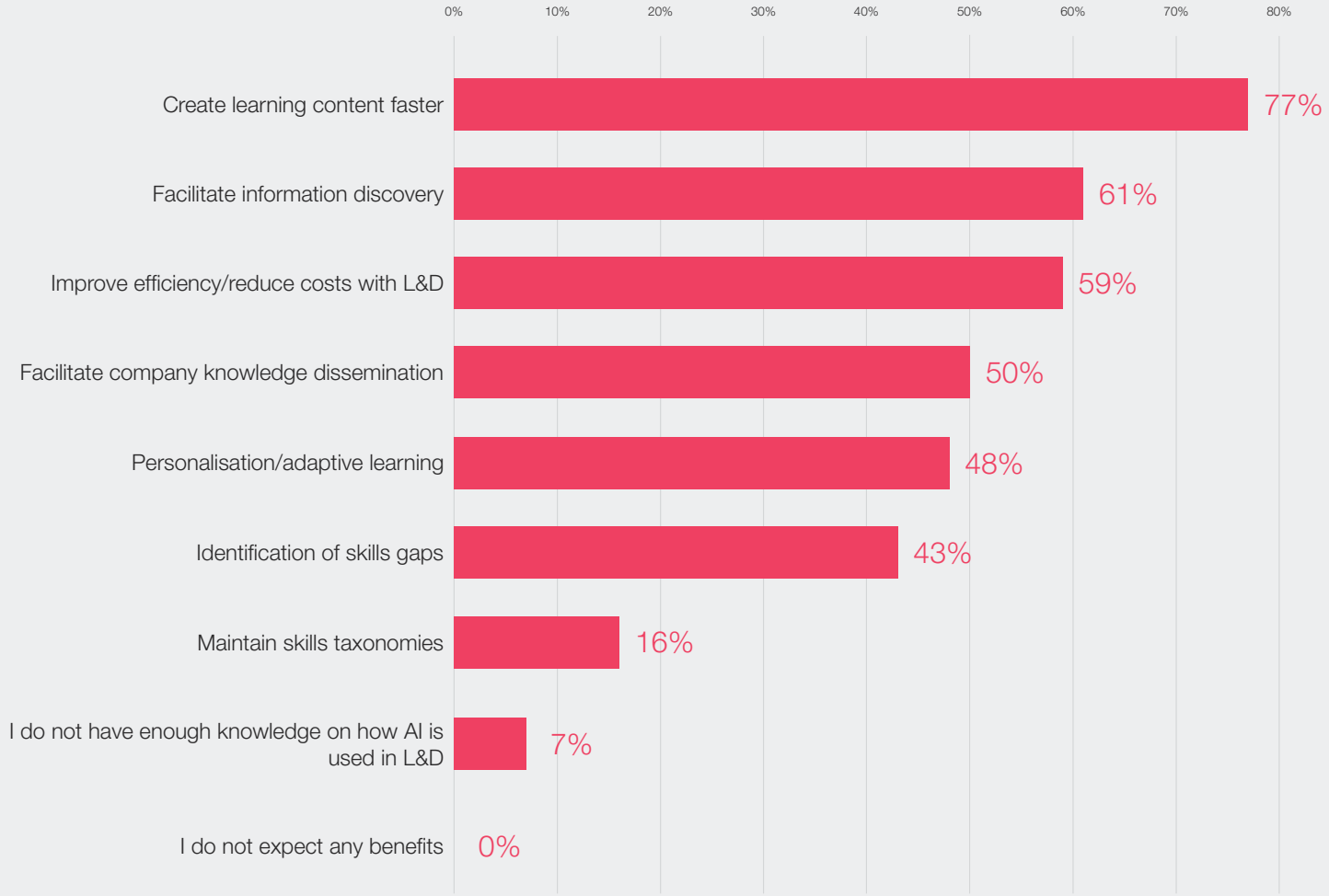
Is your organisation currently exploring, or already implementing, Artificial Intelligence for Learning & Development initiatives?



When asked directly, 33% of participants stated that their organisation was currently exploring, or already implementing, AI for L&D initiatives. This refers to the utilisation of AI technologies to create personalised training content, automate curriculum design, and provide interactive learning experiences. This integration is generally aimed at enhancing the adaptability and efficiency of training programmes by generating tailored learning paths and enabling immersive training environments. AI can also help analyse learner performance and preferences, facilitating continuous improvement of L&D initiatives and ensuring alignment with organisational goals.

For instance, in the previous question, 15% of participants indicated that their organisations were actively integrating the use of GenAI for content creation and development within their organisation. Conversely, 55% of participants responded that their organisation is not exploring or implementing AI for L&D initiatives, and 12% were unsure.

Within your organisation, what are the expected benefits of using Artificial Intelligence in Learning and Development?

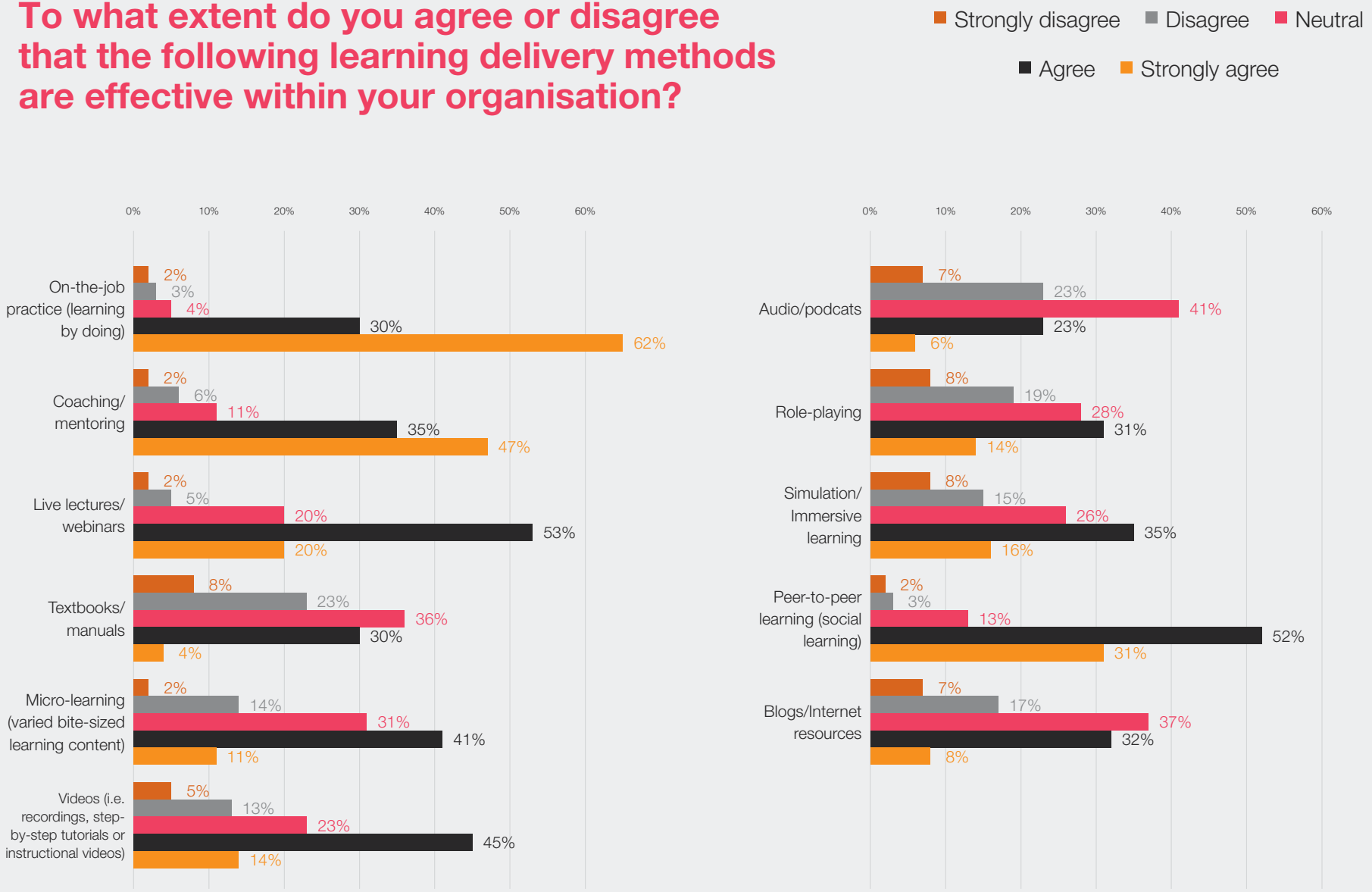


All those participants whose organisations were exploring or implementing AI were asked about their expected benefits of using AI in L&D. Creating learning content faster was the most popular perceived benefit (77%), followed by facilitated information discovery (61%), improved efficiency and reduced costs within L&D (59%), facilitated company knowledge dissemination (50%) and personalisation and adaptive learning (48%).

Indeed, utilising AI in L&D enhances efficiency, scalability, and creativity by automating repetitive tasks, generating personalised and high-quality content, and enabling rapid iteration. This approach allows L&D designers and content creators to focus on higher-value activities, fosters innovation, and improve the speed and accuracy with which tasks are completed. However, by focusing mainly on content generation, organisations are currently missing out on the use of AI technology to handle more complex tasks such as talent management and identifying skill gaps to maintain the necessary skills needed for the respective organisation to grow and achieve strategic success.

Delivery Methods of L&D

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following learning delivery methods are effective within your organisation?



Participants were presented with several delivery methods for learning and were asked to indicate how effective they were within their organisation.

92% of participants agreed that on-the-job practice (i.e. learning by doing) was the most effective delivery method within their organisation (62% strongly agreed and 30% agreed). This is likely because it allows employees to immediately apply new skills and knowledge in a real-world context. Additionally, this hands-on approach provides immediate feedback and opportunities for improvement, enhancing the overall effectiveness of training by directly aligning it with the specific needs and challenges of the job.

Furthermore, 83% of participants agreed (31% strongly agreed and 52% agreed) that peer-to-peer learning was effective. This type of learning fosters a collaborative environment where employees can share knowledge and experiences directly with one another. This helps build stronger relationships and enhances communication skills, as employees engage in discussions, problem-solving, and feedback, which can lead to improved overall performance and a more cohesive team dynamic.

Coaching/mentoring (82% strongly agreed and agreed) was ranked as the third most effective learning delivery method, in line with previous findings related to the importance given to personalised learning. Coaching skills today are becoming critical competencies for leaders and managers, and employees are seeking formal and focused 1-2-1 attention to develop their skills and maximise their potential.

Live lectures/webinars (73% strongly agreed and agreed) is another highly ranked learning delivery method and one which has rapidly increased in use and popularity over recent years. This enables organisations to reach out to both a large number of staff at once and engage with remote workers separated geographically. In this regard, Live lectures/webinars scored considerably higher than videos (59%), which indicates that organisations and staff are prioritising real-time interaction and training over recordings, step-by-step tutorials, or instructional videos.

Noteworthy is that micro-learning (i.e. varied bite-sized learning content) scored relatively lower (52%) than more traditional and widely adopted learning delivery methods. Globally, microlearning is growing as an influential tool in personal and professional development, which consists of brief, focused learning sessions, transforming how people and businesses approach learning in the digital age. Dresden University (2024) stated that microlearning improves information retention by 22% above standard learning approaches.

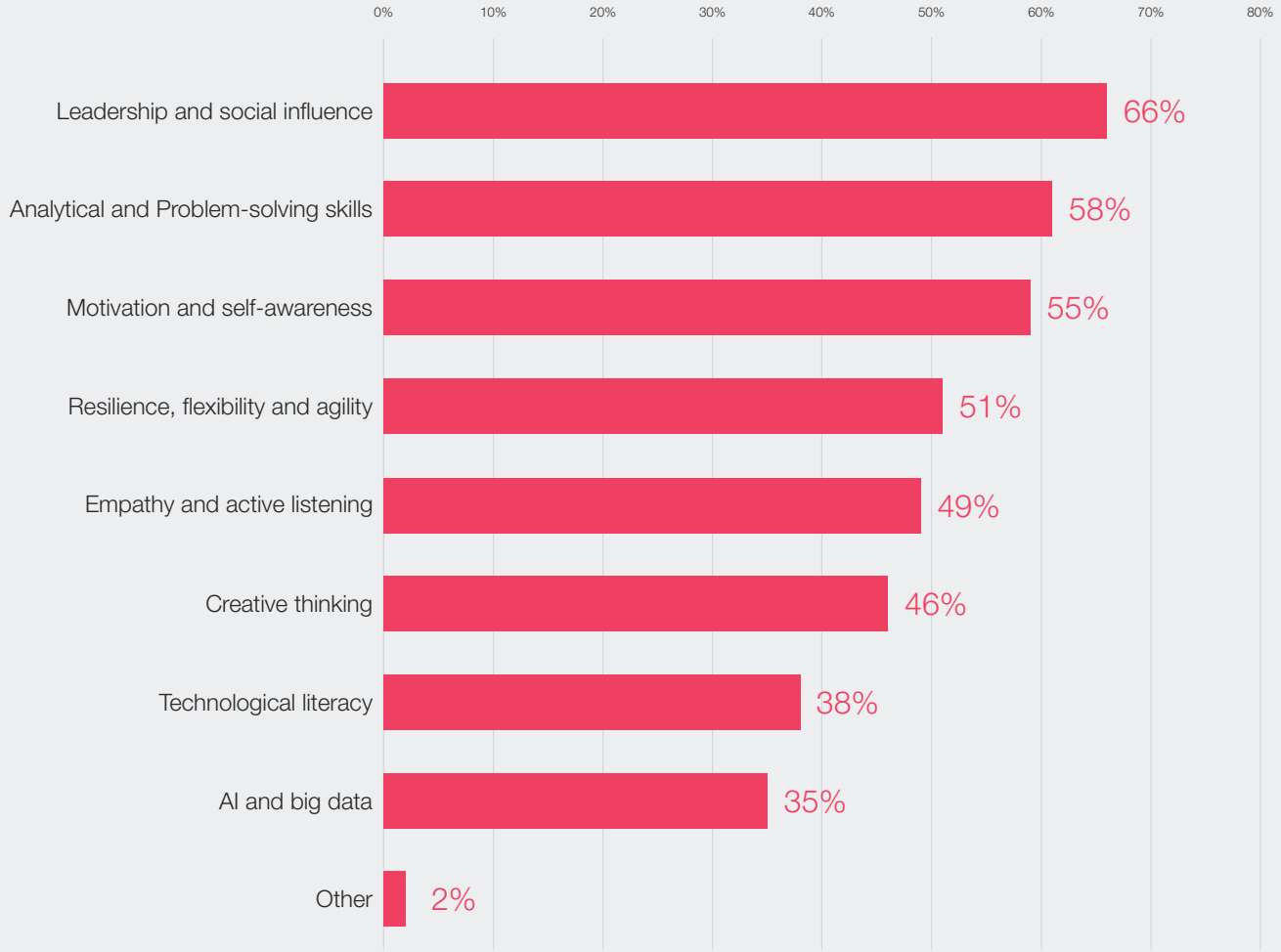
The methods that participants primarily disagreed with being effective were textbooks/manuals (31%), audio/podcasts (30%), and role-playing (27%).

Engaging Training Programmes

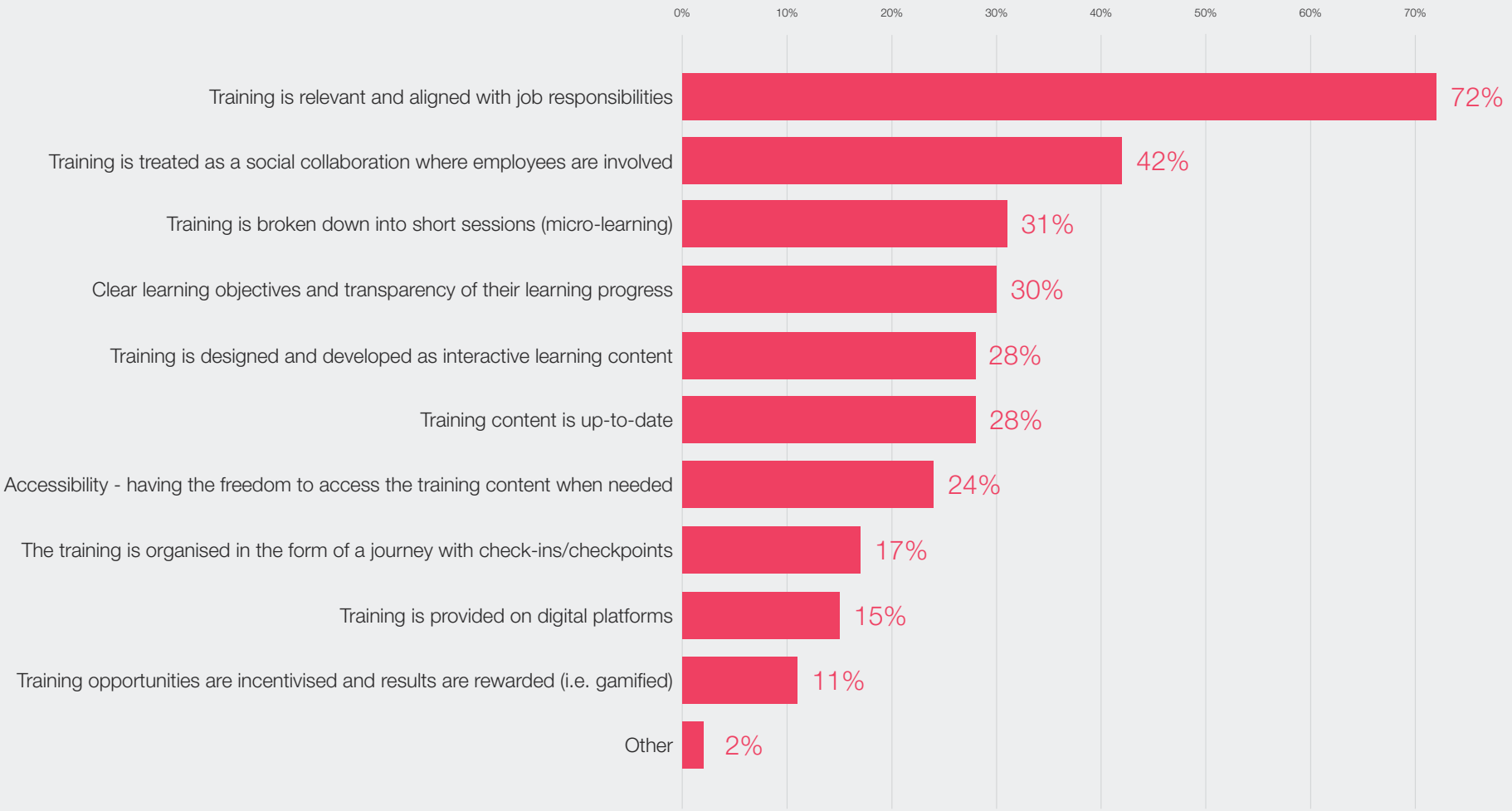
In order for an organisation to develop and implement new training programmes, it must recognise the skills that are the most important to drive its strategy. When participants were asked which skills were the most important for their organisations, leadership and social influence was the most popular choice (66%). This reflects the importance identified in the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report 2023, which stated that employers plan to focus on developing worker's skills in leadership and social influence (40% of companies).

This was followed by analytical and problem-solving skills (58%), and motivation and self-awareness (55%). Noteworthy is that technical and digital skills were the least selected options, with technological literacy (38%) and AI and big data (35%) being the least popular choices. Despite the ongoing adoption of emerging technology in the workplace, presently organisations have not felt the need to develop and implement new training programmes to tackle possible digital skills gaps.

Which of the following skills are the most important for your organisation to develop and implement new training programmes for?



Which of the following do you think are key components of an engaging training experience?



Participants were asked for the key components of an engaging training experience. 72% of participants felt that training must be relevant and aligned with the job responsibilities to be engaging. 42% of respondents indicated that training must be treated as a social collaboration where employees are involved. In addition, just 15% of respondents felt that training should be provided on digital platforms, which reflects the desire to hold training in person. In-person training allows employees to engage actively, build relationships, and share knowledge more effectively, enhancing team cohesion.

Participants also felt that training should be broken down into shorter sessions (i.e., micro-learning) (31%), that there should be clear learning objectives and transparency of their learning progress (30%), and that training should be designed and developed as interactive learning content (28%).

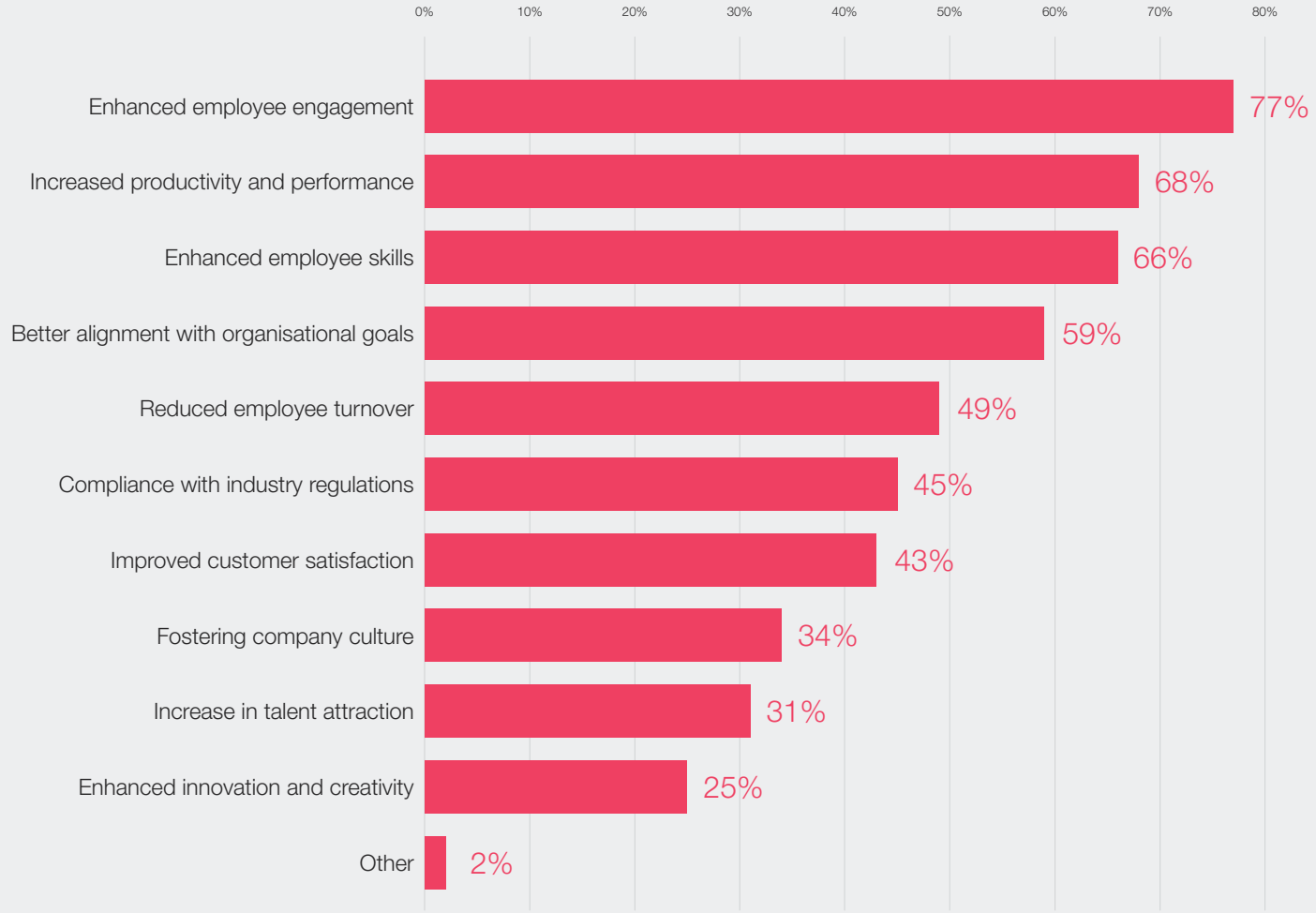
Interestingly, just 11% of participants indicated that training opportunities should be incentivised and results rewarded (i.e. gamified) to be engaging. This may be because training should not rely on incentives and rewards for engagement as it may undermine intrinsic motivation, leading to superficial participation rather than genuine learning and skill development.

Benefits of Investing in L&D Activities

Participants were asked for the expected benefits which drive their organisation to invest in L&D activities. Enhanced employee engagement was the most popular choice (77%), followed by increased productivity and performance (68%), and enhanced employee skills (66%). In this regard, it is of interest that organisations appear to be investing in L&D primarily to improve engagement and therefore the employee experience, rather than to improve performance and skills as is generally presumed. This may be due to the increasing pressures for employers to be perceived as an employer of choice, besides fostering a culture of continuous growth and providing opportunities for career advancement.

Conversely, increase in talent attraction (31%) and enhanced innovation and creativity (25%) were the least popular choices.

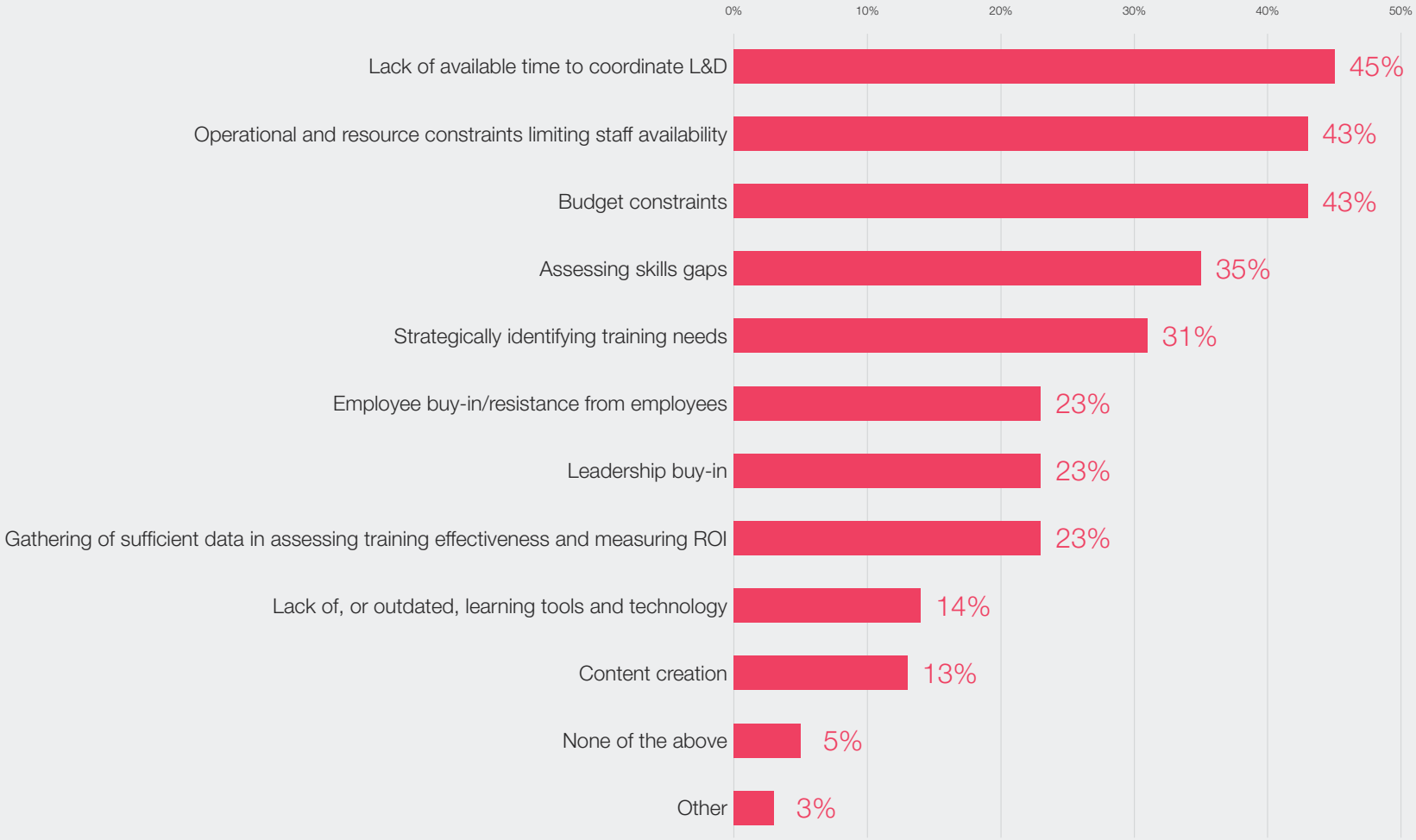
Which of the following expected benefits are your organisation's main drivers for investing in L&D activities?



Challenges of L&D

Participants were asked for the main challenges that their organisation currently faces in developing its workforce. Lack of available time to coordinate L&D (45%), operational and resource constraints limiting staff availability (43%), and budget constraints (43%) were the most popular choices. These were followed by assessing skills gaps (35%) and strategically identifying training needs (31%). Lack of, or outdated, learning tools and technology (14%) and content creation (13%) were the least popular choices.

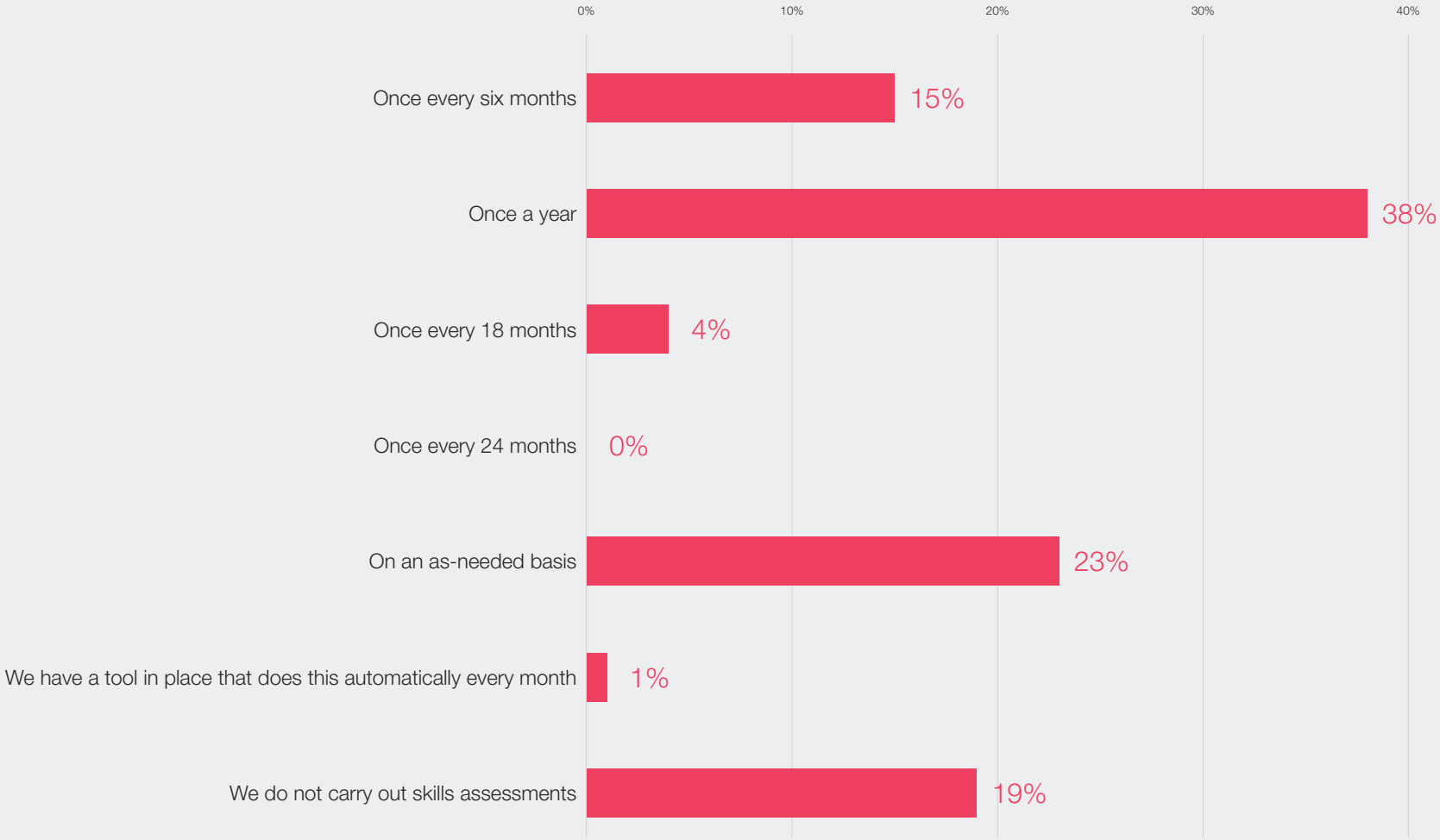
What are the main challenges your organisation currently faces in developing its workforce?



Skills Assessments

Participants were asked for the frequency in which their organisation formally conducts skills assessments to identify gaps and training needs. Organisations should generally conduct skills assessments at least annually to ensure employees' competencies align with evolving business needs and to identify areas for targeted development. 38% of participants indicated that assessments occur once a year, whilst 15% indicated that assessments occur once every six months, 23% indicated that assessments occur on an as-needed basis, while 19% responded that assessments are not carried out.

How frequently does your organisation formally conduct skills assessments to identify gaps and training needs?



Preferred Talent Management Offerings

Participants were asked what talent management offerings they believe employees prioritise when selecting an employer. Clarity and transparency of possible career paths was the most popular choice (76%), followed by regular performance feedback (58%), and mentoring and coaching received (53%). It appears that employees would like a clear vision of growth opportunities and long-term potential within the organisation, enhancing their job satisfaction and commitment.

The quality of the training programme (36%), quality of the onboarding training (33%) and the quantity of relevant training programmes (16%) were the least popular choices. This may indicate that organisations find that employees prioritise more long-term development opportunities and the overall work environment rather than initial or extensive training offerings. This seems somewhat contradictory to the identified benefits of L&D where the highest scoring factor was employee engagement.

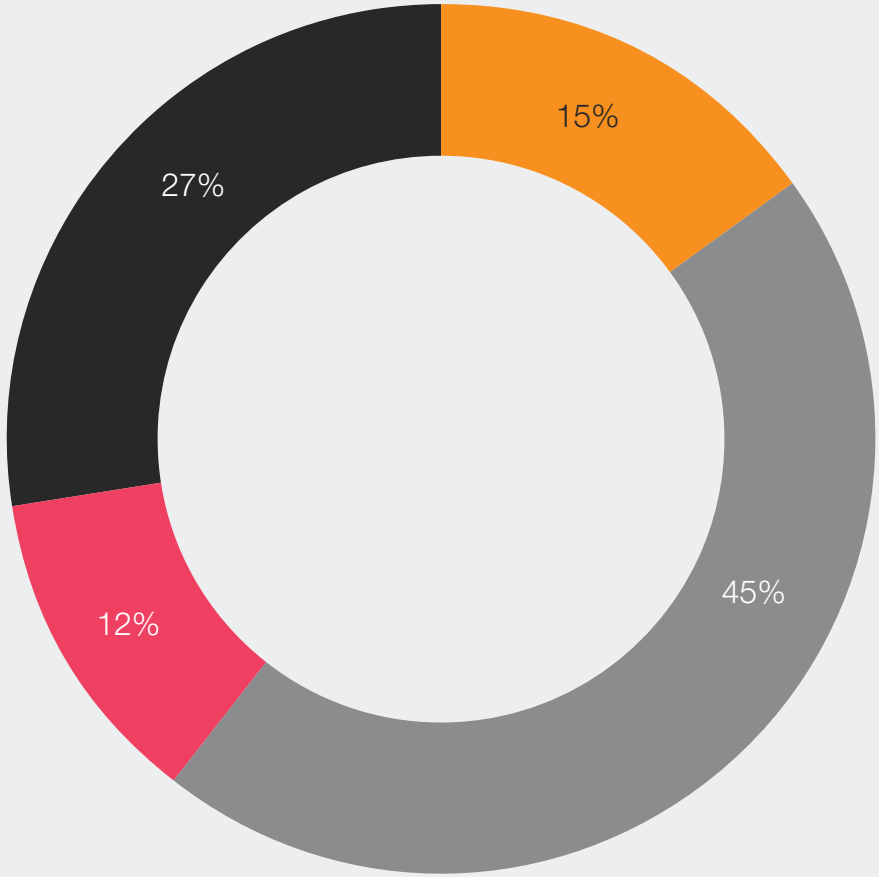
Which of the following talent management offerings do you think employees prioritise when selecting an employer?

Succession Planning

Succession planning is the process of identifying the critical positions within one's organisation and devising action plans for individuals to be developed and assume those positions when required. Organisations should have a succession plan in place to ensure continuity of leadership, mitigate risks associated with key personnel turnover, develop and retain talent, and maintain operational stability during leadership transitions.

45% of participants indicated that their organisation currently has an active formal succession plan in place for identified key roles across different grades, while 15% of participants indicated that this was only true for senior leadership roles. 27% of participants responded that they do not currently have a succession plan in place and 12% responded that they are currently developing a succession plan.

Succession planning is the process of identifying the critical positions within one's organisation and devising action plans for individuals to be developed and assume those positions when required. Do you currently have an active formal succession plan in place?



Conclusion

In a constantly evolving HR landscape, organisations must adapt to market dynamics and changing employee expectations. This year's HR Pulse Survey results illustrate the insights and opinions from Malta's HR community and top executives on talent management and learning technology, as well as the priorities and challenges they currently face.

The uptake of Digital Learning has increased rapidly in recent years due to being flexible, fast, and delivering exceptional results at a fraction of the classroom cost. This provides flexibility for users and content can be delivered to teams and individuals on-demand on their preferred devices at any time and any place. Self-paced and interactive access increases proficiency and allows learners to revisit information, re-take tests, and track their progress. Furthermore, online education enables the learner or trainer to access from anywhere. Self-paced eLearning courses are believed to use 40% to 60% less employee time compared to Instructor-led Training, which often takes people away from their jobs for hours or days and can require travel costs. This makes more time available for employees to be productive, together with generally being more affordable, unlike face-to-face training.

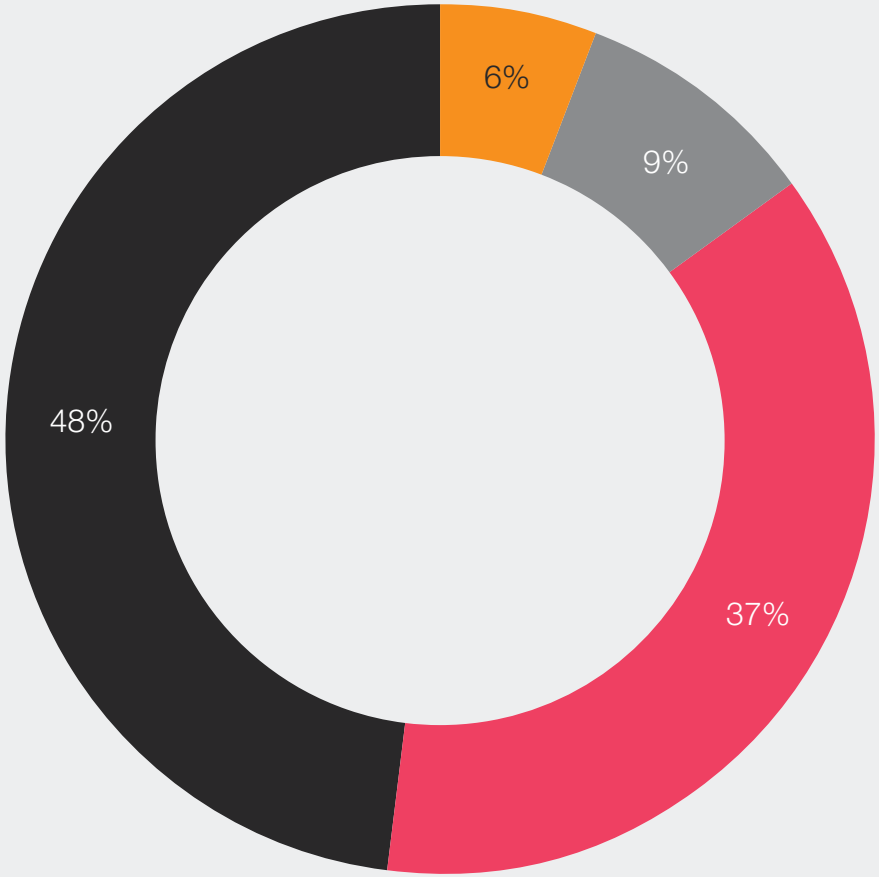
The 2024 PwC Hopes & Fears survey found that 51% of respondents moderately or strongly agree that the skills their job requires will change in the next five years. Furthermore, fewer than half (46%) of workers surveyed say they moderately or strongly agree that their employer provides adequate opportunities to learn new skills that would be helpful to their career.

This year's survey uncovered how coaching, mentoring, and skills-based talent management are popular L&D activities which are being widely integrated within organisations. The survey also found an increased focus on personalised learning which many believe enhances employee engagement and learning effectiveness. Additionally, fostering a culture of learning and using skills inventories to understand workforce abilities supports a skills-first strategy. In this regard, half of organisations have a formal competency framework in place. Organisations that are actively integrating the use of GenAI for L&D initiatives experience enhanced adaptability and efficiency of training programs, reduced costs, and continuous improvement of initiatives. This is commensurate with the findings in PwC's 27th Annual Global CEO Survey, which found that about 60% of CEOs anticipate GenAI to yield efficiency benefits by offering relief from routine tasks.

The survey also shed light on challenges that organisations face when developing their workforce, such as time, resource, and budget constraints. However, the use of modern technology, as well as utilising delivery methods such as on-the-job practice and peer-to-peer learning increase the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering training. Furthermore, the expected benefits of investing in L&D activities make it worthwhile for companies to do so, such as increased productivity, innovation, competitive advantage, and retention. Business and HR leaders are called to acknowledge these benefits with curiosity and proactivity. With strategic commitment, clarity, and an unwavering pursuit of excellence, the L&D landscape in Malta appears to be putting skills and technology at the centre of professional development activities.

About the Survey

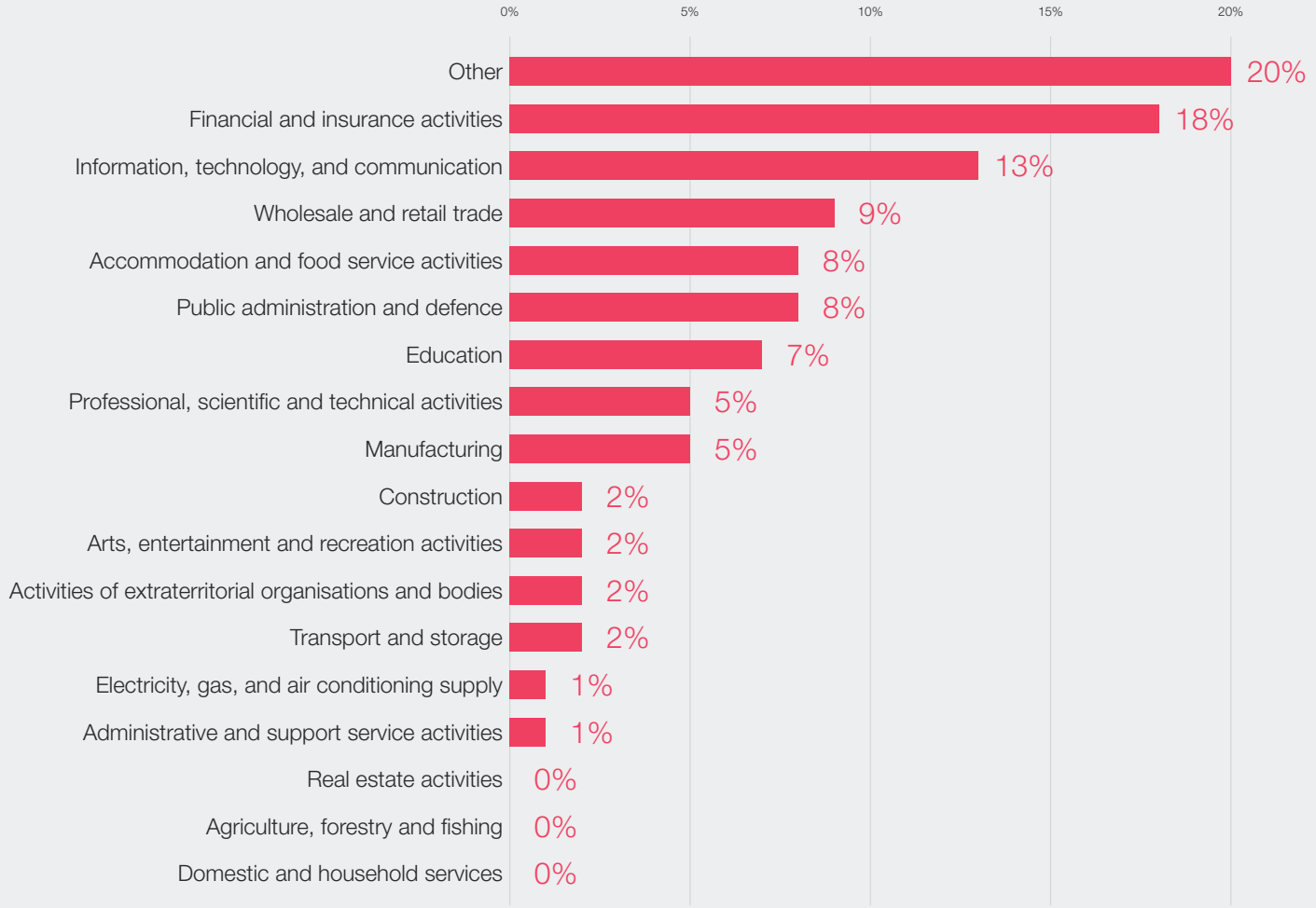
Please indicate the number of employees within your company (full-time equivalents)



A total of 132 participants contributed to this year's HR Pulse Survey.

The results indicate that most of the respondents hail from medium to large companies. In particular, 37% belong to companies with between 50 and 249 employees and 48% to companies with more than 250 employees.

Which sector is your company/group predominantly in?



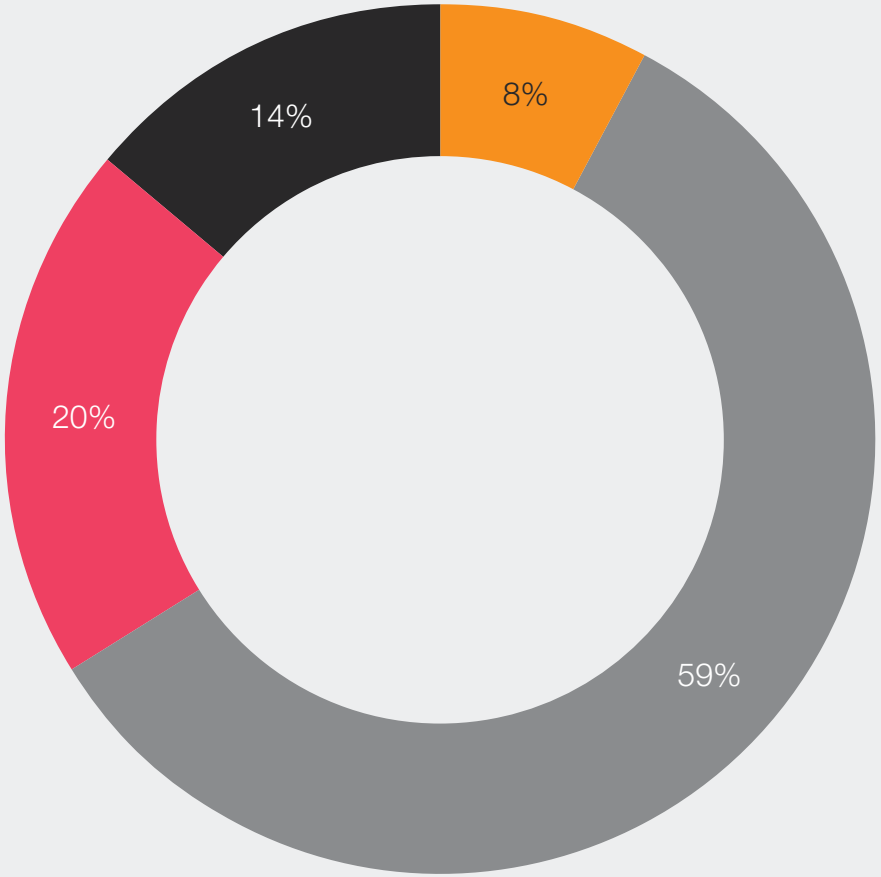
The main sectors in which the respondents operated were:

- Financial and insurance activities: 18%
- Information, technology, and communication: 13%
- Wholesale and retail trade: 9%

The category ‘Other’ includes sectors such as Healthcare, Waste Management, Oil Industry, Disability Services, Elderly and Care, Employment and Training.

Wholesale & Retail Trade were selected by 9% of participants. The two sectors Accommodation & Food Services activities and Public Administration & Defence were equally represented at 8%. Education was identified by 7% of participants, while the two sectors Professional, Scientific, & Technical activities and Manufacturing were identified by 5% of the participants.

What is your position within the organisation?



More than half of the survey participants (59%), occupied central HR leadership roles such as HR Director, Head of HR or HR Manager. Furthermore, 20% of participants held other HR roles besides the aforementioned ones. This underlines the significant representation of HR professionals in our dataset.

A smaller fraction (8%) held senior management positions such as CEO, Managing Director or General Manager. Otherwise, 14% of participants fell within the ‘Other’ category, which accounts for roles ranging from executive functions and finance-related positions to senior management roles in various capacities.

CEO / Managing Director / General Manager
CHRO / HR Director / Head of HR / HR Manager
Other HR Roles
Other

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