ATD's State of the Industry Bonus Report

The Challenges and Priorities of TD Professionals

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Contents
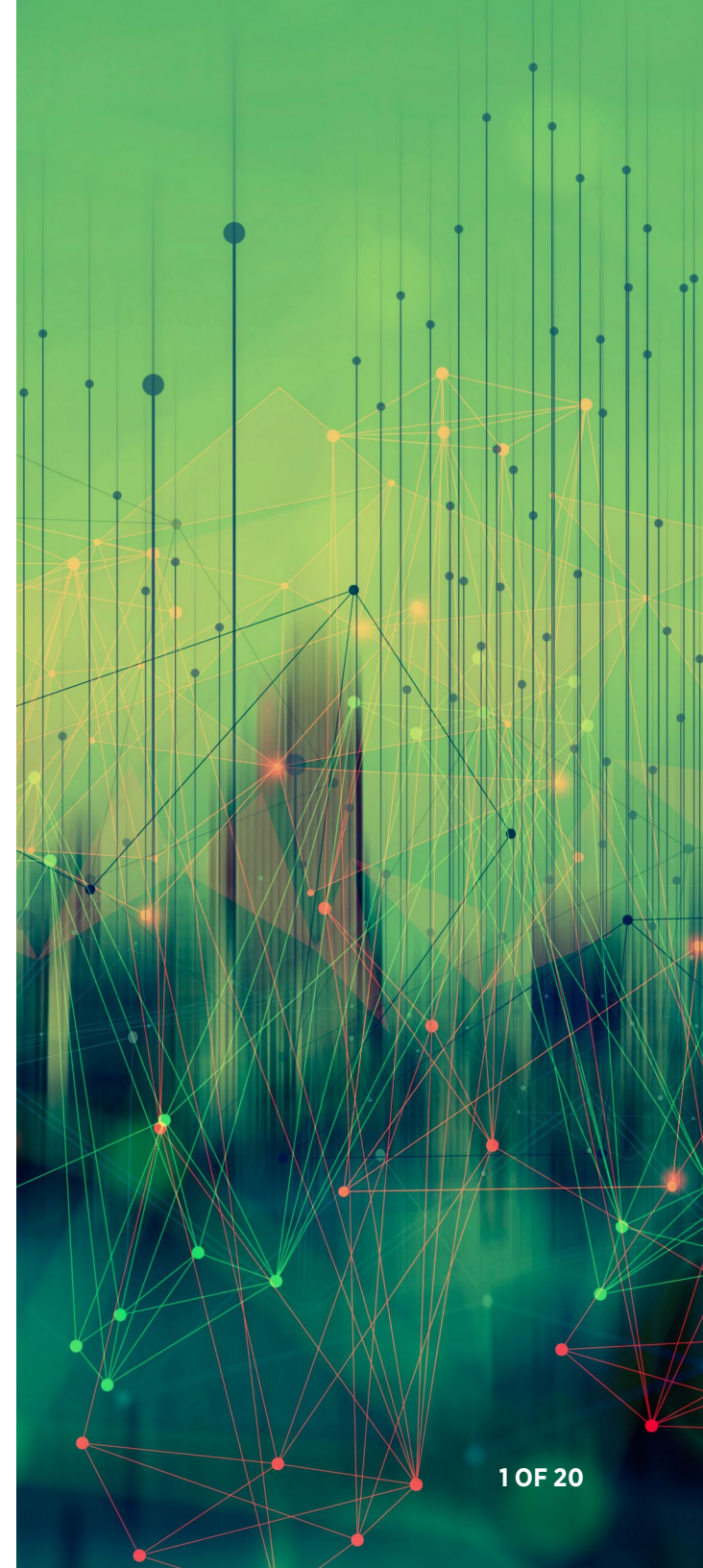
A Note From the Sponsor

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We are at a pivotal moment in history. The rapid emergence of AI and other technological advancements is reshaping the workforce, and while these innovations offer extraordinary opportunities to improve outcomes, they also raise a critical question: What is the role of humans in a world increasingly dominated by machines?

The answer lies in embracing a fundamental human advantage that both differentiates us from technology and ensures we leverage technology effectively—awareness.

At Insights, we believe that awareness is the catalyst for impact. It's the foundation upon which growth and success are built. Whether it's understanding one's strengths, identifying opportunities for improvement, or adapting to the needs of others, activating awareness empowers individuals and teams to excel. It ensures we can offer the right supports and pathways to meet employees where they are and help them succeed.

Onboarding is an essential area where we can become more efficient and effective by activating awareness and supporting personalized approaches for each employee.

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About Insights

Insights Learning & Development is a global organization working with some of the world's biggest companies, helping their people increase awareness of self, improve relationships, and solve real and pressing business issues.

Insights Discovery uses a simple and memorable four color model to help people understand their style, their strengths, and the value they bring to the team. We help people understand themselves and others, communicate with impact, and become more effective teams by putting people right at the heart of everything we do.

Insights' purpose is to create a world where people truly understand themselves and others and are inspired to make a positive difference in everything they do. Our people are guided by our values of making a difference, delivering results, working together, enabling success, and enjoying the journey.

Introduction

Thank you for participating in the *2024 State of the Industry* study. We appreciate your support of this important research initiative. To show our appreciation, we've produced this exclusive bonus report detailing the challenges and the future priorities of the TD function. We hope this will give you the opportunity to learn about what other organizations are experiencing and how they are overcoming the same challenges you might be experiencing. This report also includes links to ATD resources to learn more about these topics.

Thank you again for participating in the research. We appreciate you!
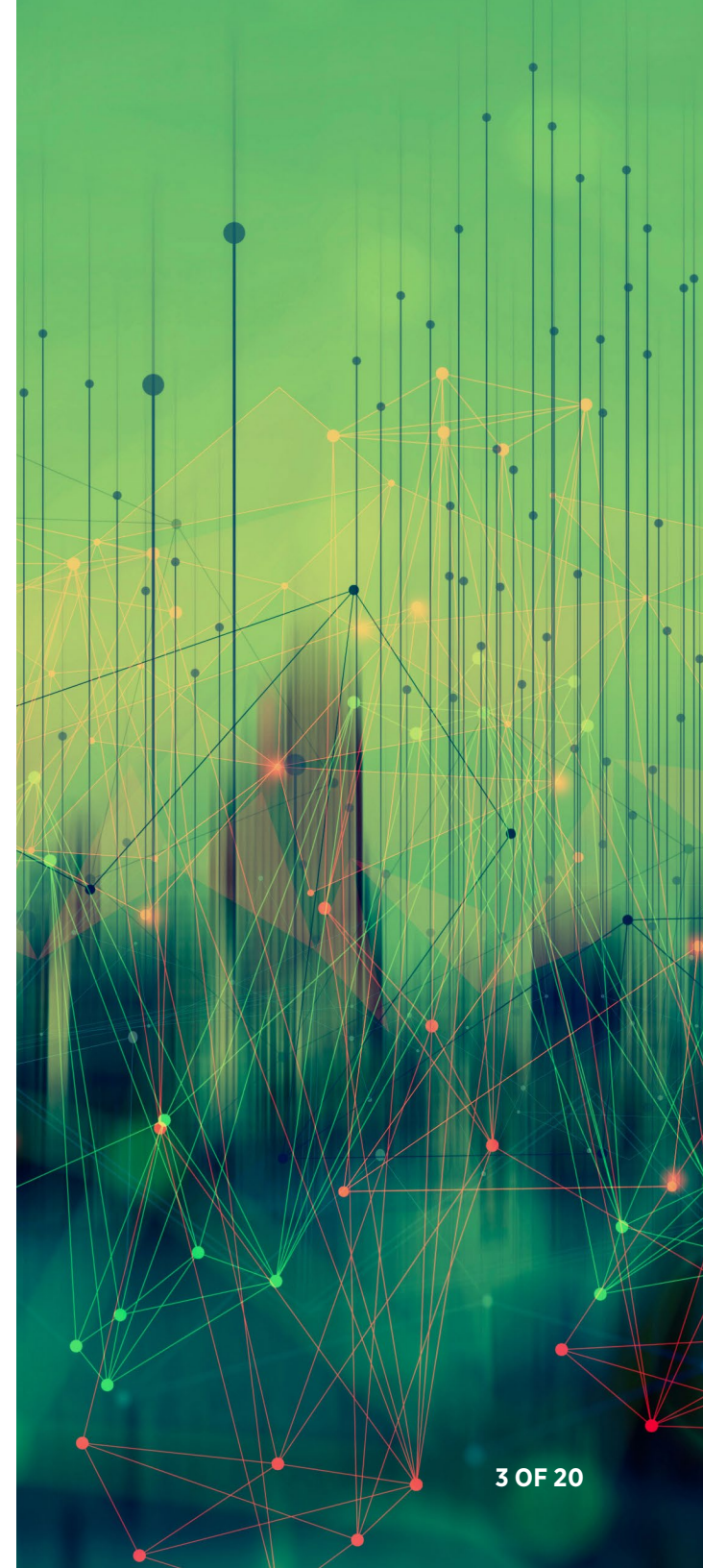
Section 1

Challenges

Common challenges for organizations include prioritization of multiple demands, inadequate budget or resources, leadership development, not enough time to devote to projects, and advancing organizational transformation.

Question: In 2023, what were your organization's three biggest TD challenges?

Challenge	Percentage
Prioritization of multiple demands	37%
Inadequate budget or resources	27%
Leadership development	25%
Not enough time to devote to projects	24%
Advancing organizational transformation	22%
Coping with the pace of change	21%
Scaling with few resources	21%
Combating employee disengagement	21%
Preventing and responding to burnout	17%
Reporting measurable business outcomes	17%
Leveraging artificial intelligence, including generative AI	15%
Lack of executive sponsorship for TD initiatives	14%
Deploying tools for next-generation content and engagement	14%
No challenges	6%
Other	5%

Prioritization of Multiple Demands

TD professionals are busy, and requests come in from many different departments. As 37 percent of TD professionals affirm, this can make it difficult to prioritize multiple demands. In addition, 11 percent of respondents say this is their biggest challenge.

To overcome this challenge, respondents say they:

• Have conversations with stakeholders about which demands will have the biggest influence on organizational business goals.

• Prioritize demands by rank-ordering the projects and then constantly revisiting that list to make changes as needed.

• Learn to say no to projects that don't align with business goals and outcomes.

• Delegate project tasks.

• Outsource projects as needed.

• Are flexible about what their department can handle.

• Use technology to automate tasks and reporting to be efficient with their time.

• Are proactive and ask departments for their needs ahead of time.

If you struggle to prioritize multiple demands, try these tips:

• **Sort the tasks.** You can sort them by difficulty (either starting with the most difficult task or the easy wins), due date (starting with the most urgent tasks), or importance (start with the most important tasks). Or, you may want to do a combination of all three.

• **If you don't have due dates, create them.** It might help to set due dates to keep yourself on schedule.

• **Be flexible.** You may start the day with one priority, but that may have to shift by the end of the day.

• **Delegate.** If you realize that you can't get everything done, you may want to delegate appropriate tasks to other people.

Inadequate Budget or Resources

In the *2024 State of the Industry* report, ATD Research received a range of answers about TD budgets. Some organizations have large budgets, while others have tighter budgets. Twenty-seven percent of TD professionals say they struggle with having an inadequate budget or resources; 11 percent say this is their biggest challenge.

Respondents have a variety of methods for overcoming this challenge, including:

• Applying for available grants

• Taking advantage of free training opportunities

• Doing as much as possible internally

• Prioritizing projects that can be completed with the available budget and resources

• Making tough decisions about scaling back to reduce costs.

For more information and to read *Making the Case for Investing in Talent Development*, visit td.org/MakingTheCase.

If you are struggling with an inadequate budget or lack of resources, you might need to increase your efforts to prove the value of the TD function. Try these tips, which are drawn from the ATD report *Making the Case for Investing in Talent Development*:[1]

• **Have a strong reputation at your organization.** Make sure that co-workers and leaders see your work as credible, trustworthy, and reliable. This can make it easier to request funds for new projects.

• **Learn the business strategy and link your projects to a business objective.** Measure the impact and communicate that with leaders. They need to understand why TD is important and how it can make a difference for the organization.

• **Build relationships and collaborate on projects.** Other departments may have funds that they can spend on talent development. Building relationships is the first step to finding these important collaborations.

Leadership Development

Leadership development was listed as a top challenge over the past year and a top priority for the future. In 2023, ATD found that 77 percent of organizations offer leadership development programs and activities, yet only 12 percent of organizations said they were extremely satisfied with that program.[2] In the current study, a quarter of organizations say leadership development is a challenge for them; 9 percent say this is their biggest challenge.

To overcome this challenge, respondents say they:

• Focus on retaining leaders.

• Make their leadership development courses more engaging so people want to participate.

• Add mentoring programs for participants in leadership development programs.

• Create a new position focused on professional development for employees.

• Develop new programs for existing and new leaders.

• Create some mandatory training programs as well as optional opportunities.

For more information and to read Michael Leimbach and Tom Roth's *TD* magazine article, visit td.org/content/td-magazine/the-leadership-development-mismatch.

Michael Leimbach and Tom Roth have some advice for creating a leadership development program:[3]

• **Choose the right learning methods.** Look for training methods that are effective for leadership development, such as on-the-job training, simulations, and the instructor-led classroom.

• **Create a leadership learning journey.** This can include a combination of learning methods, including in person, virtual, and blended learning.

Not Enough Time to Devote to Projects

Talent development professionals are busy. They are working on multiple projects and have to manage their time wisely. Twenty-four percent of respondents say they don't have enough time to devote to projects; 6 percent say this is their top challenge.

To overcome this challenge, respondents say they:

• Create a project plan with objectives and key milestones.

• Outsource projects they don't have time to complete.

• Use project management software.

• Make the business case to hire more TD staff

• Streamline their processes to eliminate redundancies

For more information about time management tips and to read
Jamie Champagne's *TD* magazine article, visit
td.org/content/td-magazine/productivity-hacks-to-get-your-time-back.

If you struggle with having enough time to work on everything, try these tips from Jamie Champagne:[4]

• **Focus on completing one task.** Then, when that task is completed, move to the next one. These small wins will turn into big gains.

• **Make meetings productive.** Keep each meeting's focus on the outcomes.

Advancing Organizational Transformation

A 2023 *Harvard Business Review* study found that 67 percent of leaders had experienced at least one underperforming transformation in the past five years.[5] Given that so many organizations struggle with organizational transformation, it's not surprising that 22 percent of TD professionals say this is a challenge for them. Six percent say this is their biggest challenge.

To overcome this challenge, respondents say they:

• Improve their relationships with stakeholders.

• Have a clear vision that they communicate with all stakeholders, which helps manage expectations.

• Develop a strategic plan and then implement it.

• Host discovery sessions with stakeholders.

If you struggle with advancing organizational transformation, ATD recommends the following:

• **Conduct a change readiness assessment.** ATD offers a job aid for conducting an organizational change readiness assessment in the "Securing Buy-In for Change" issue of *TD at Work*.

• **Develop a communication strategy.** Have a clear plan ready about the transformation process that considers the message timing, audience, and topic.

For more information about organizational change readiness, download "Securing Buy-In for Change" at td.org/product/p/741902.
For more transformation tips and to read "Guide to Navigating Transformation," visit td.org/atd-blog/guide-to-navigating-transformation.

Other Challenges

TD professionals deal with many other challenges on a daily basis.

For example, 21 percent of respondents say it is difficult to cope with the pace of change. From reorganizations and new technologies to employees coming and going, there are always ripples of change occurring.

Employee disengagement and burnout are two other challenges organizations face today. Disengagement is cited as one of the biggest challenges by 21 percent of respondents, while 17 percent say employee burnout is one of their biggest challenges.

Some of these challenges include tools and technology; 14 percent of respondents say they have trouble deploying tools for next generation content and engagement. AI is also top of mind; 15 percent of TD professionals see leveraging AI as a challenge.

Some organizations (17 percent) struggle with reporting measurable business outcomes. If TD professionals can't link learning to business goals, this could make it hard for them to find executive sponsorship.
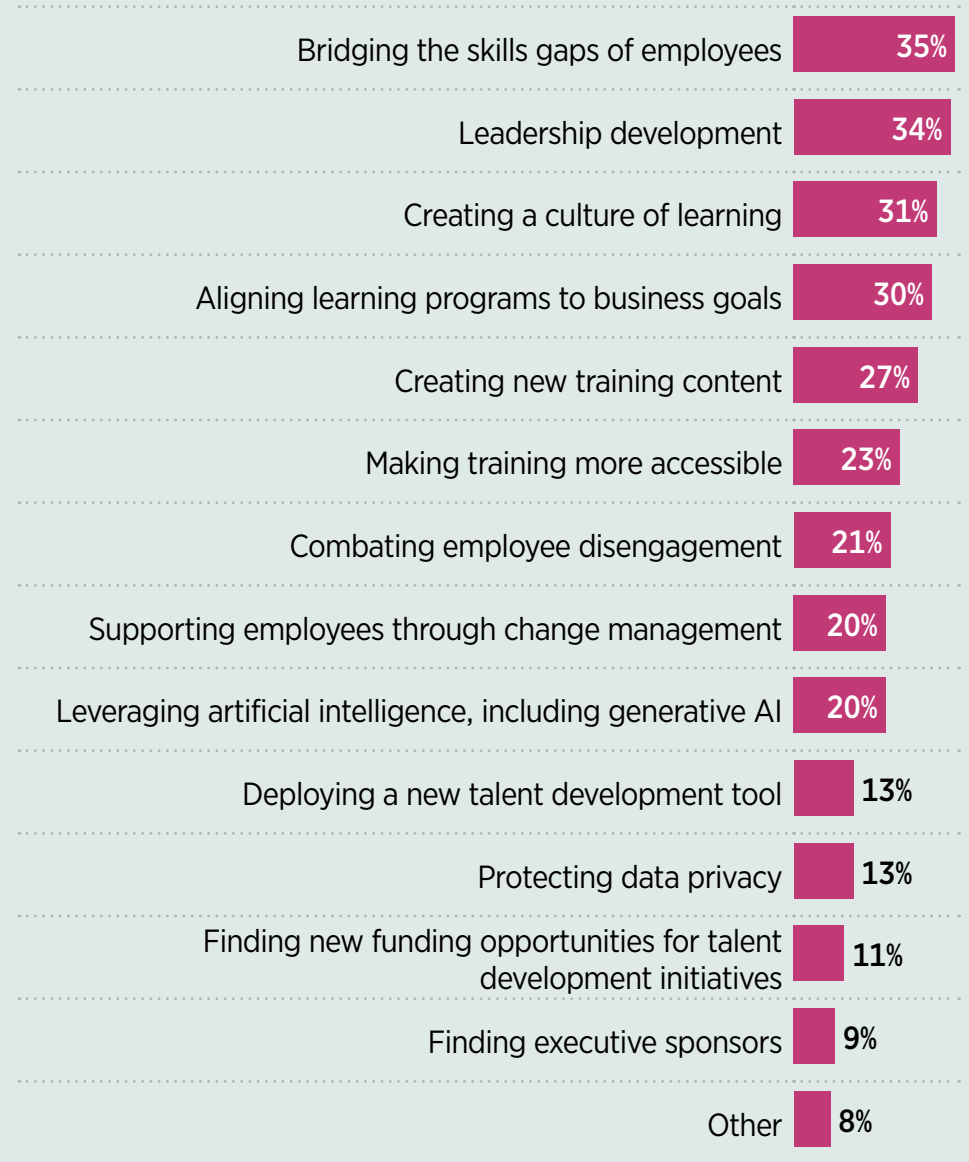
Section 2

Priorities for the Future

Common priorities for TD departments include bridging skills gaps, leadership development, creating a culture of learning, aligning learning programs to business goals, and creating new training content.

Question: What are your department's three biggest TD priorities for the future?

Priority	Percentage
Bridging the skills gaps of employees	35%
Leadership development	34%
Creating a culture of learning	31%
Aligning learning programs to business goals	30%
Creating new training content	27%
Making training more accessible	23%
Combating employee disengagement	21%
Supporting employees through change management	20%
Leveraging artificial intelligence, including generative AI	20%
Deploying a new talent development tool	13%
Protecting data privacy	13%
Finding new funding opportunities for talent development initiatives	11%
Finding executive sponsors	9%
Other	8%

Skills Gaps

Many organizations (35 percent) plan to prioritize bridging skills gaps in the next year. Of those, 43 percent say they are ready to tackle this challenge right now and 51 percent are working on a plan.

A previous ATD study found that common areas in which organizations experience skills gaps include communication and interpersonal skills, project management skills, managerial skills, and leadership skills.[6]

And these skills gaps are organization wide—TD professionals are even expecting to see skills gaps within their own department in the future. The ATD report *Bridging the TD Skills Gap* found that TD professionals are concerned about their own skills when it comes to evaluating impact, data and analytics, and collaboration and leadership.[7]

Defining Skills Gap

This report defines a skills gap as "a significant gap between an organization's current capabilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals and meet customer demand."[8]

Leadership Development

As mentioned earlier, organizations are noticing a gap in leadership skills, so it's not surprising that leadership development is a priority for 34 percent of organizations for the future. Of those that are prioritizing leadership development, 60 percent of organizations say they are ready to tackle this issue and 38 percent are working on a plan.

According to ATD's *2024 State of the Industry* report, 69 percent of organizations are offering executive development programs and 89 percent are offering managerial and supervisory training. Popular topics for leadership development training programs include communication skills, goal setting, and teamwork.[9]

Defining Leadership Development

This report defines leadership development as "any activity that increases an individual's leadership ability or an organization's leadership capability, including activities such as learning events, mentoring, coaching, self-study, job rotation, and special assignments to develop the knowledge and skills required to lead."[10]

Culture of Learning

TD professionals are also prioritizing creating a culture of learning. Thirty-one percent of respondents say this is a top priority in the coming year; of those, 45 percent are ready to tackle it.

Organizations that want to create a culture of learning should:[11]

- Have top executives communicate about the importance of learning.

- Involve managers in the learning process.

- Create personalized development plans and show learners the value of these programs.

- Promote learning opportunities to all employees.

- Model good learning practices by planning learning activities for the TD team.

Defining Learning Culture

This report defines a culture of learning as "an organizational culture in which employees continuously seek, share, and apply new knowledge and skills to improve individual and organizational performance."[12]

Aligning Learning to Business Goals

TD professionals are prioritizing aligning learning programs to business goals in the future. This is a top priority for 30 percent of respondents in the coming year, and 45 percent are ready to tackle it.

ATD recommends that TD professionals develop their business acumen and take these steps:[13]

• Understand the business and the business needs.

• Talk to internal stakeholders to understand challenges and opportunities.

• Measure and link TD solutions back to the business.

For more information on business acumen and to read the "Business Acumen Basics for Talent Development" issue of *TD at Work*, visit td.org/product/p/251804.

New Content

TD professionals are prioritizing creating new training content in the future. This is a priority for 27 percent of respondents in the coming year, and 62 percent are ready to tackle it.

Starting from scratch and developing new content is a daunting task. Garima Gupta's article, "Making Your Way Through a Mountain of Content," includes helpful tips for TD professionals who are building a new course.[14] She provides the following advice:

• Start with the critical questions, like who is the learner? What do they need to learn?

• As you skim through the material you have collected, start creating a design document.

• Develop a concise text copy of the course.

• Once you have the content, think about making it engaging and interactive.

• Ask someone else to review the content. A second set of eyes is always useful.

Other Priorities

Other organizational priorities include making training more accessible, supporting employees through change management, and leveraging AI.

Twenty-three percent of organizations are prioritizing the accessibility of their training programs. As explained in the ATD article, "Data-Driven Insights on Training Accessibility," it's important for TD professionals to design user interfaces that give all employees the same opportunities to learn new skills.[15]

In addition, one in five organizations are prioritizing change management to support employees. While 20 percent of organizations are prioritizing use of AI in talent development, it's also important to consider the ethics of using this new technology. ATD, along with CTDO Next, ATD's exclusive consortium of TD leaders, published seven principles for TD professionals to keep in mind when implementing AI, including transparency, privacy, and security.[16]

**For more information and to read the article
"7 Principles to Guide the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," visit
td.org/content/atd-blog/7-principles-to-guide-the-ethics-of-artificial-intelligence.**

Defining Change Management

Change management is "the process for enabling change within an organization by using structured approaches to shift individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a future state."[17]

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

There are common themes between challenges that organizations have experienced and their priorities for the future. A quarter of organizations say leadership development was a challenge for them in 2023, while 34 percent plan to prioritize this area in the future. It's promising to see that organizations are recognizing these challenges and creating plans to improve them.

ATD's *2024 State of the Industry* report and this bonus report are created to help you make data-driven decisions around the TD function and learning initiatives in your organization. Thank you for your contributions and we hope you continue participating in future ATD research initiatives.
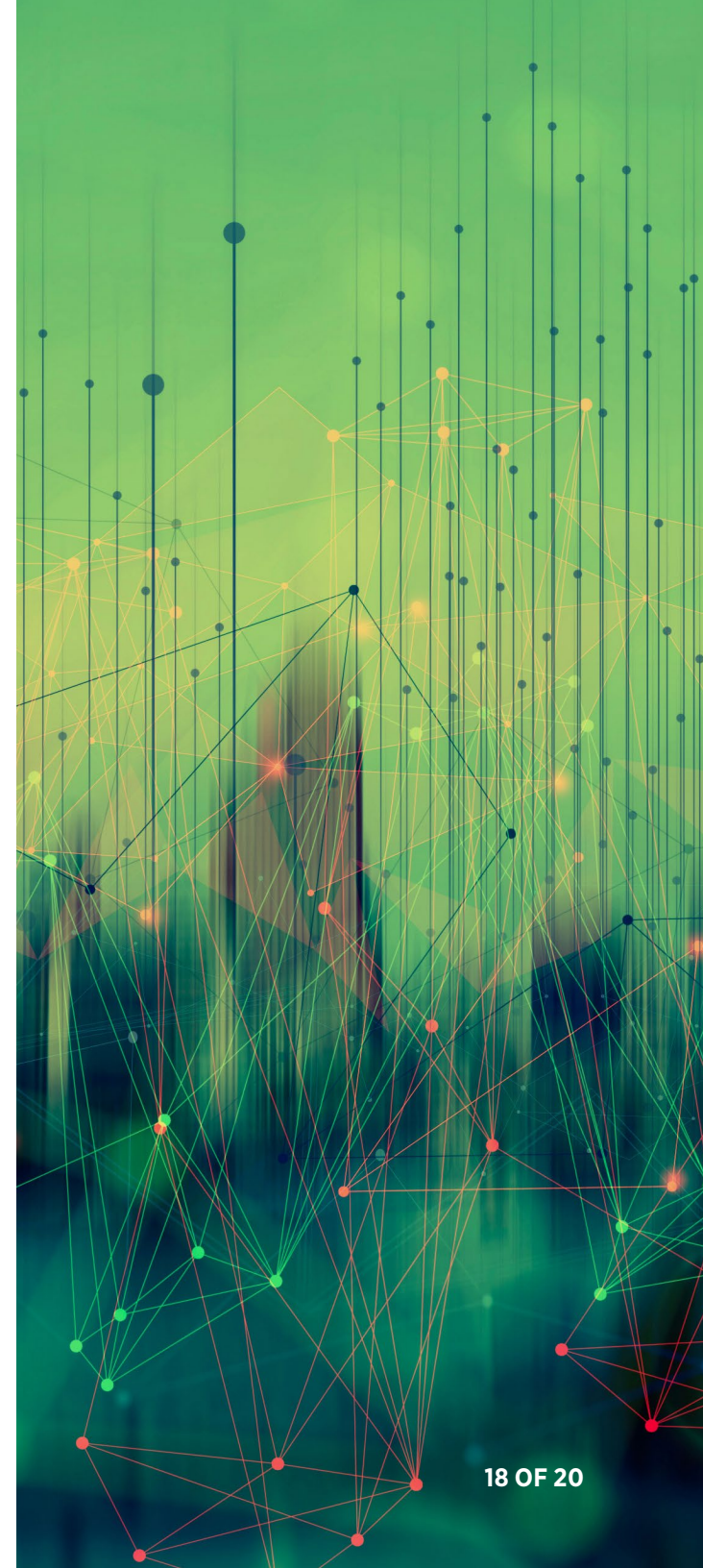
Notes

1   Association for Talent Development (ATD), *Making the Case for Investing in Talent Development: Six Case Studies* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2024).

2   ATD, *Leadership Development: Preparing Leaders for Success* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2023).

3   M. Leimbach and T. Roth, "The Leadership Development Mismatch," *TD*, March 1, 2024, td.org/content/td-magazine/the-leadership-development-mismatch.

4   J. Champagne, "Productivity Hacks to Get Your Time Back: Be Efficient and Effective to Get Things Done," *TD*, August 1, 2024, td.org/content/td-magazine/productivity-hacks-to-get-your-time-back.

5   A. White, M. Wheelock, A. Canwell, and M. Smets, "6 Key Levers of a Successful Organizational Transformation," *Harvard Business Review,* May 10, 2023, hbr.org/2023/05/6-key-levers-of-a-successful-organizational-transformation.

6   ATD, *Bridging the Skills Gap: Using Learning Opportunities to Address Current and Future Talent Needs* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2024).

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About the Author and Contributors

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most-trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries. Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace.

The resources we provide to help talent development professionals increase their impact and effectiveness include our research. ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.

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Learn more at TD.org.

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