Engagement and Collaboration:

Top Learning Investment Objectives

BY JOE DIDONATO

When it comes to investments in workplace learning technologies, the "new math" in 2014 seems to be all about *engagement* and *collaboration, according to the 2014 E-learning User Study*. The prevailing thinking seems to be that if a company can increase employee *engagement*, that engagement will increase individual learning and productivity. Taking that logic to the enterprise level, the thinking is that if investments in *collaboration* are also made, then this will enhance enterprise learning and productivity. Together, most companies are betting that their investment in both *engagement* and *collaboration* will pay off big in innovation and profits for the enterprise.

THE NEW MATH IN 2014

Engagement =
individual learning + productivity
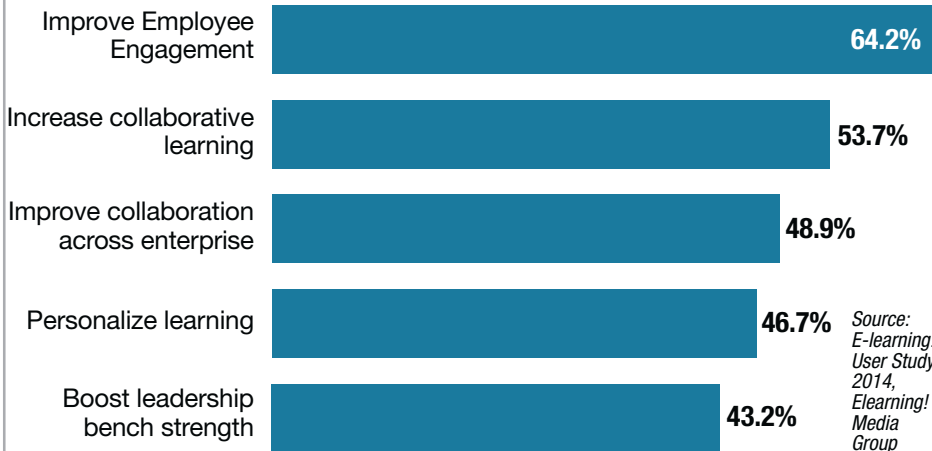
Collaboration =
enterprise learning + productivity

Engagement + Collaboration =
innovation + profits

TOP OBJECTIVES FOR INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGIES

When we asked about the top business objectives behind an organization's investment strategies, an interesting consensus emerged. Improving employee engagement was the number one reason for investing. And right behind that were expenditures to increase collaborative learning from an individual level — as well as across the enterprise.

The other top initiative seems to be around the *personalization of learning*. That's becoming increasingly important, as the amount of time and attention that employees are willing and able to invest in learning is being challenged by increased workloads and the demands of their daily work lives.

TOP BUSINESS OBJECTIVES FOR INVESTING IN LEARNING WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGIES

Objective	Percentage
Improve Employee Engagement	64.2%
Increase collaborative learning	53.7%
Improve collaboration across enterprise	48.9%
Personalize learning	46.7%
Boost leadership bench strength	43.2%

Source: E-learning! User Study 2014, Elearning! Media Group

Other top reasons behind the investment in workplace learning technologies also should be noted: boosting leadership bench strength; improving leadership skills; the myriad of corporate business drivers such as driving sales and profits; responding to competitive moves; and speeding up the time to market with new products and services.

WHAT LEARNING INITIATIVES ARE PLANNED?

At the top of the list are *e-learning programs* that were planned by 81.5% of the respondents in 2014. But right behind that initiative is *mobile learning or mobile support* initiatives, which came in second. And then right after that came *personalized learning*, using predictive or adaptive algorithms to mimic how consumer sites like Amazon and Netflix provide suggestions.

Rounding out the top five initiatives are *global learning programs* and *social learning programs*. Other initiatives that didn't make the top five include *user-generated content programs*, *extended enterprise initiatives* and *immersive learning programs*.

NEW TOOLS BEING ACQUIRED

The next set of questions asked what tools were being acquired to accomplish the enterprise initiatives that were planned. This is where the level of consensus started to fall off. You'll notice from the response percentages that the spending would be across multiple technologies and tools, with no clear single tool set coming out as the winner.

At the top of the list are *mobile learning* (33.3%), *e-learning development tools* (30.3%), and *video solutions* (24.9%). These choices make a lot of sense, as they are the tools required to reach an increasingly mobile and diverse learning population — especially when travel to a central learning facility is not as practical. Adding credence to that trend is that *virtual events and classrooms* were in the fourth position with 22.4% of the anticipated spending. But the entire gamut of spending was very diverse, as can easily be seen by the graphic of the top tools being acquired (next page).
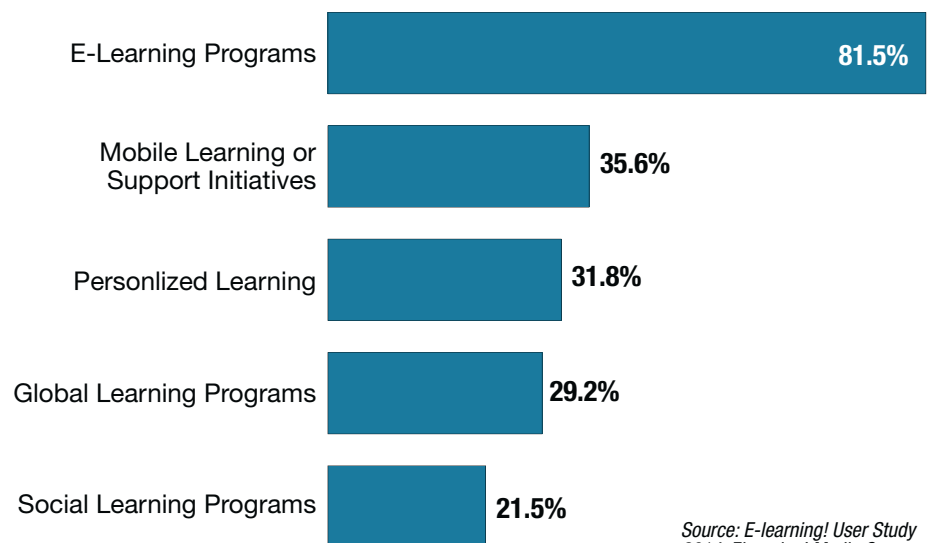
MOVEMENT TO THE CLOUD

There is a rapid and growing trend toward cloud-based or SaaS solutions in most enterprises. (SaaS means software-as-a-service, and cloud means that your application and content are usually residing at a learning vendor's sites.) This first big movement to these types of solutions started with LMS vendors and some larger content suppliers. But since then, this trend has spread across the industry. Some vendors who support both on-premise and cloud solutions are reporting that the latter represent as much as 75% of their new business.

The benefits are really pretty substantial. They include the speed of implementation; the automatic handling of maintenance and update; and the handling of training peaks and valleys without having to substantially change an enterprise's infrastructure. As more favorable pricing algorithms surface, such as movement away from seat licensing, this will be a continuing growth area. Some of the newer pricing models rely on course storage metrics for cost, or on active learner registrations.

The first question we asked was about what types of projects are driving this movement to the cloud. The following list is what the respondents reported as their biggest contributing factors that required or favored cloud or SaaS solutions:
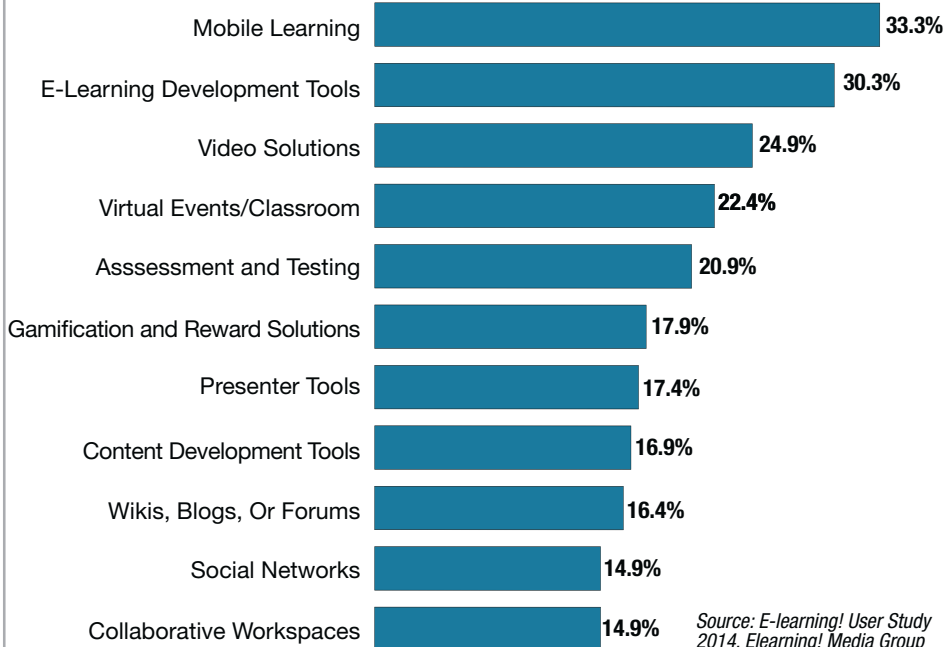
>> The need for Web meeting solutions: 78.5%
>> The need for 24-hour access to content: 62.7%

TOP ENTERPRISE-WIDE LEARNING INITIATIVES IN 2014

Initiative	Percentage
E-Learning Programs	81.5%
Mobile Learning or Support Initiatives	35.6%
Personlized Learning	31.8%
Global Learning Programs	29.2%
Social Learning Programs	21.5%

Source: E-learning! User Study 2014, Elearning! Media Group

E-LEARNING TOOLS PURCHASE PLANS

Tool	Percentage
Mobile Learning	33.3%
E-Learning Development Tools	30.3%
Video Solutions	24.9%
Virtual Events/Classroom	22.4%
Asssessment and Testing	20.9%
Gamification and Reward Solutions	17.9%
Presenter Tools	17.4%
Content Development Tools	16.9%
Wikis, Blogs, Or Forums	16.4%
Social Networks	14.9%
Collaborative Workspaces	14.9%

Source: E-learning! User Study 2014, Elearning! Media Group

>> The need for access to on-demand sessions after the live event: 43.5%
>> The need for virtual learning environments: 41.3%
>> The need for virtual classrooms: 40.4%
>> The ability to collaborate with peers before, during or after live events: 29.4%

LMS AND TMS TRENDS

We then looked at the foothold in the LMS/TMS/LCMS space (learning management systems/talent management systems/learning content management systems). We asked about the total number of implementations that each respondent had at his or her enterprise, and then how many of those were on-premise versus cloud- or SaaS-based. As you can see from the chart (right), LMS's still dominate the overall landscape, but a growing percentage of all three of these installation types are moving to the cloud or to a SaaS-based solution.

As existing installations are quite involved for many enterprises, it is pretty hard to move from one installation type to another. In some cases, like in the pharmaceutical or medical arenas, the courses would have to be re-certified with governing agencies. However, once the move to a cloud or SaaS solution is made, it is generally agreed that it is much easier to change vendors. That spells a lot of upside for the user community, while at the same time forces a renewed commitment from the vendors to properly service and support all of their new cloud or SaaS-based customers.
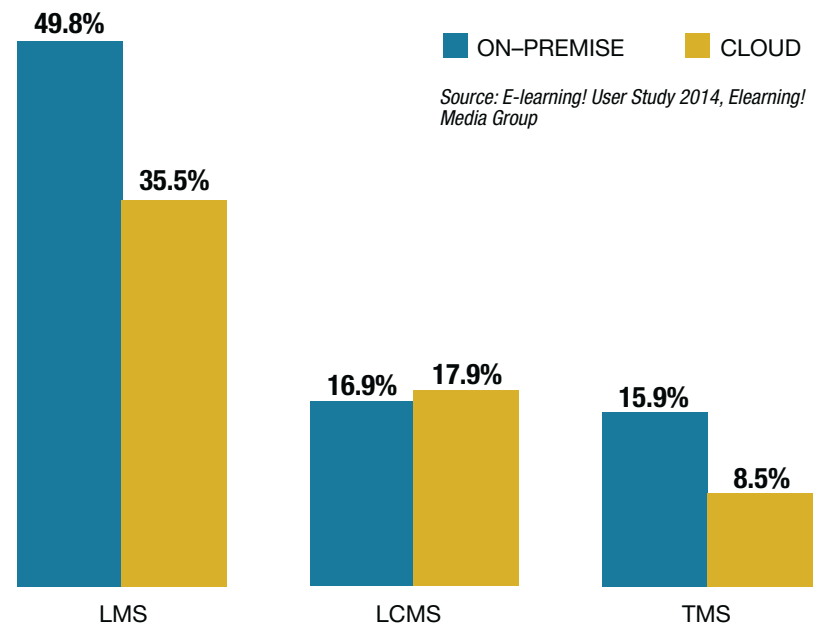
THE PUSH FOR COLLABORATION

In general, both employees and companies seem to experience substantial paybacks when *collaboration* is facilitated across an enterprise.

When we asked our respondents what was behind this push for collaboration all of a sudden, they pointed to the following two enterprise mandates as drivers:
>> Increase individual collaborative learning
>> Improve collaboration across the enterprise

There was a time when collaboration was a factor of the distance between two individuals' offices or cubicles, but with the new technologies being planned like *social learning networks* (39.3%) and *collaborative work spaces* (32.3%), collaboration has expanded readily across the enterprise.

The growing trend is that within most company forums, groups, blogs and wikis, individuals are sharing everything they know, and in the process "turning knowledge into ideas and new processes" that were unimaginable as little as only a decade ago. This collaboration trend is, of course, facilitated by technology. But aiding and abetting this collaboration trend is the notion of *common values*, whether that is the solving of a complex business problem, a new product, or simply a consensus on a common direction or purpose. This trend has its roots in our social lives, and as a result, it was only a matter of time before we saw it spreading into our work environment, schools and institutions of higher learning.

With 80% of the education and training

TOTAL ON–PREMISE VS. CLOUD/SAAS IMPLEMENTATIONS

ON–PREMISE   CLOUD

Source: E-learning! User Study 2014, Elearning! Media Group

	ON–PREMISE	CLOUD
LMS	49.8%	35.5%
LCMS	16.9%	17.9%
TMS	15.9%	8.5%

CORPORATE ENTERPRISE SPENDING

$6.4 million
Learning budget per respondent

$4.9 million
E-learning annual investment per respondent

PUBLIC SECTOR SPENDING

$12.8 million
Learning budget per respondent

$7.3 million
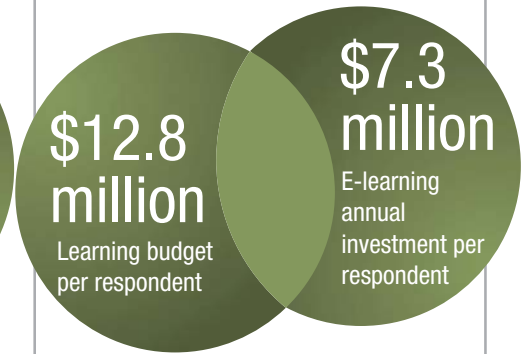E-learning annual investment per respondent
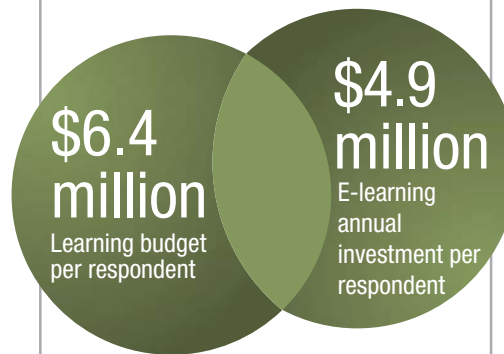
happening informally, it's apparent that this is an area where we have underserved our learners. Now, with tools like *social learning networks* and *collaborative work spaces,* the legitimizing of *informal learning* is suddenly well within our grasp. As we build out these collaboration tools, a lot of other functionality is fairly new to the field of learning. System functionality such as *peer ratings*, *badging* and *invitations to join* are being experimented with to increase the use of these collaborative platforms.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We like and embrace these new trends, "new math," *engagement* and *collaboration*. Study after study suggests that if you can increase employee *engagement*, individual learning and productivity increase proportionately. Coupling *employee engagement* with investments in *collaboration* at the enterprise level will greatly enhance enterprise learning and productivity. We see that many enterprises also agree and are betting that their investment in both *engagement* and *collaboration* will pay off big in innovation and profits for the enterprise.

In his book "Open: How We'll Work, Live and Learn in the Future," David Price tells many stories about how companies like Telus and Xerox used collaboration via social learning platforms to save their companies huge sums of money and other resources. And we've also seen the impact that collaboration has made at companies like 3M, Google, and others who give their employees free time to collaborate and pursue new ideas. The patent office and market valuations stand as testimony to that practice, but it's not as simple as flip-

ping a switch. There's that notion of *trust* that has to be a part of the cultural formula.

But all of this sharing and collaboration represents a shift both in culture and thinking, from the "command and control from the top" management style, to a trusted environment that is receptive to ideas that flow up from the bottom. Mistakes will be made, but WD-40's CEO Garry Ridge has relabeled them *learning moments*.

> **Companies like 3M and Google give employees free time to collaborate and pursue new ideas.**

Once this cultural and thinking threshold is crossed, technology tools that enhance *engagement* and *collaboration* are among the most strategic purchases that an enterprise can make. That's certainly been the case in our *Learning!* 100 award winners' enterprises. ⓔ

—Collaboration and engagement are the underpinnings in many of the projects that our Learning! 100 award winners have submitted. We hope to share more of those successes at our "celebration of excellence" in Anaheim, at the Enterprise Learning! Conference Aug. 25-27. To download a copy of our complete report, please go to the Website www.2elearning.com/resources/research-white-papers. To find out more about our conference, visit www.ELCEShow.com.