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L&D Trend Report 2026

Dear reader,

the troodi L&D Trend Report 2026 aims to provide you with an up-to-date overview of key developments in learning and development.

People development is facing increasing challenges in many organizations. Economic uncertainty, changing business models, and rapid advances in artificial intelligence are changing the demands placed on employees and companies alike. L&D teams are under greater pressure to develop the skills of employees in order to ensure the resilience and future viability of the organization.

With the L&D Trend Report 2026, we offer a compact insight into the current role of L&D and how it can be further developed. The report is based on an online survey of 119 people, mainly from internal HR and L&D teams in organizations based in Germany. The results are supplemented by selected comparative figures from the previous year.

This report is intended to provide you with inspiration, a strategic perspective, and practical approaches for your L&D work.

If you have any questions or feedback on the content, please feel free to contact us. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Warm regards,

Mona Markmann
Head of Digital Product at troodi and
Author of the L&D Trend Report

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What do you think will be the most important L&D trend in 2026?

Trend	2026	2025
AI – Learning support	31.1 %	
AI – Personalized learning paths	24.4 %	
KI – Overall		46.3 %
Skill-based learning	21 %	13 %
Self-directed learning	14.3 %	21.3 %
Micro learning	4.2 %	9.3 %
Social learning	3.4 %	5.6 %
VR / AR	0.8 %	0.9 %

■ 2026   ■ 2025
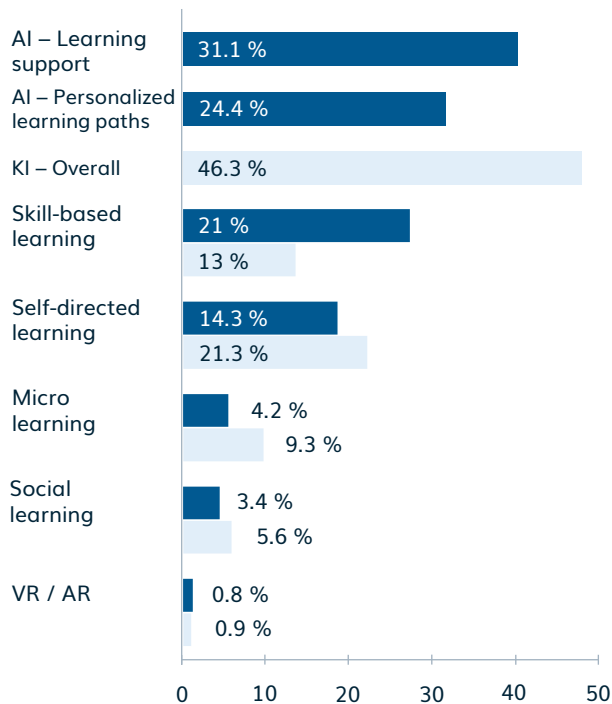
Which topics are perceived as the most important trends for 2026 – and how does this compare to the outlook of 2025?

Artificial intelligence as an ongoing trend

In the 2025 Trend Survey, a clear majority of respondents rated "artificial intelligence" as by far the most important trend.

This trend will continue in 2026. For a more nuanced picture, this year's survey distinguished between AI-supported learning guidance (31.1 %) and AI-supported personalized learning paths (24.4 %). AI learning support refers to applications that assist learners in their everyday work, for example through feedback, prompts for reflection, or selective assistance. AI-supported personalized learning paths aim to tailor content and learning steps to the individual's role, prior knowledge, and learning needs.

Combined, this brings the relevance of artificial intelligence in the respondents' assessment to 55.5 %. This illustrates the continuing high or even increased expectations of the technology.

Skill-based learning is gaining importance

In addition to AI, other topics remain visible. Self-directed learning is losing relevance compared to 2025 (14.3 %), while skill-based learning is gaining importance (21.0 %). This development points to a shift away from self-directed learning toward more targeted development of specific professional skills.

This suggests that companies are increasingly anchoring skills development in areas where it directly contributes to business goals: learning should not only benefit individual development but also make a measurable contribution to the organization's performance, competitiveness, and long-term viability.

Other topics are fading into the background

Trends of recent years, such as micro-learning and social learning, continue to lose significance: VR/AR are only mentioned in isolated cases.

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AI in L&D

Between strategic objectives and practical implementation

Artificial Intelligence

For more than half of those surveyed, AI in the form of learning support or personalized learning paths is the most important L&D trend for 2026. How far have organizations come in actually integrating AI into their L&D strategy?

High expectations, limited implementation

While around a third of respondents stated last year that artificial intelligence plays no role in their L&D strategy, this percentage has dropped significantly. At the same time, the partial integration of AI into L&D processes has increased. Over the course of the past year, AI has become more firmly established in the processes and strategic planning of organizations. Similar to last year, the implementation of AI in many organizations remains in the pilot stage. A comprehensive, strategically anchored AI strategy remains the exception and shows little development compared to the previous year.

AI in L&D strategy

To what extent is AI already integrated into your current L&D strategy?

Not at all – AI does not play a role in our L&D strategy (at the moment).
21 %
30.6 %

First steps – The importance of AI has been recognized and initial discussions or small pilot projects exist.
46.2 %
44.4 %

Partially integrated – AI is used in some processes or learning offers, but it is not deeply anchored.
29.4 %
21.3 %

Fully integrated – Our L&D strategy relies heavily on AI and its extensive use in L&D-specific processes and content.
3.4 %
3.7 %

0   10   20   30   40   50

■ 2026   ☐ 2025

This reveals an area of tension: organizations identify AI as strategically relevant, but its widespread integration into structures and processes is only developing gradually. This can be understood as an indication that a consistently AI-supported workday is neither realistic nor beneficial for many organizations. Instead, there is an increasingly differentiated approach to AI, with a focus on specific use cases that add value. At the same time, external studies show that many AI initiatives in companies initially fall short of expectations. For example, a recent study by the MIT project NANDA on the "State of AI in Business 2025" concludes that around 95 % of the generative AI projects examined have not yet achieved a measurable financial return because pilot projects are often not transferred into viable, process-integrated solutions.[1]

Organizations suspend AI projects or do not scale them further if key prerequisites are missing, such as:

- **Unclear objectives:** no common understanding of the problem, vague expectations, lack of success criteria and KPIs
- **Technical complexity:** heterogeneous system landscape, complex integration, high dependence on IT resources and service providers
- **Acceptance within the company:** reservations among managers, employees, and the employee representative committee, uncertainty, lack of support
- **Resources & priorities:** AI initiatives compete with other transformation projects, limited budget and time capacities

Faced with these factors, AI is not yet perceived as a "fully integrated" part of the L&D strategy in many places, despite its high visibility. For L&D teams, the focus is thus shifting from the question of whether AI should be used to the question of what it should be used for and with what goal.

[1] MIT NANDA (2025): The GenAI Divide. State of AI in Business 2025.

Conclusions for L&D teams

Several action points for L&D teams can be derived from the survey results and the challenges described:

- **Clear focus:** Concentrate AI use on a few clearly defined use cases, e.g., learning recommendations, FAQ bots for learning content, support in creating learning materials
- **Alignment with the L&D strategy:** Consistently link AI initiatives to overarching L&D and corporate goals; no isolated experiments without clear objectives
- **Close cooperation with IT and business units:** Early clarification of databases, interfaces, security, and compliance requirements; joint responsibility for operation and further development
- **Acceptance and transparency:** clear communication to learners and managers about where and how AI is used, what added value it offers, and what its limitations are
- **Competence building in your own department:** empower L&D teams to use AI-supported tools in a reflective manner, both for designing learning offerings and in collaboration with the business

If these aspects are taken into account, AI can play to its strengths as a complement to human expertise and make a tangible contribution to achieving goals without creating the expectation that learning and development work can be completely automated.

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L&D as strategic partner in uncertain times

Challenges

From your perspective, what will be the biggest challenge for L&D in 2025?

Establishment of a (self-)learning culture
23.5 %

Ensure long-lasting impact of L&D measures
21.9 %

Low budget for L&D activites
19.3 %

Supporting the organisation's future viability
18.5 %

Convince stakeholders of L&D measures
10.9 %

Improving employee performance
5.9 %

%

0   10   20   30

The economic conditions currently affecting many companies are characterized by uncertainty, cost pressure, and frequent change processes. Against this backdrop, the question of what role L&D plays in the future viability of the organization is taking center stage.

The results show that there is no single primary "pain point," but rather several issues that shape the role of L&D in economically challenging times.

Establishment of a (self-)learning culture (23.5 %)

Even though self-directed learning is no longer considered a trend topic, an active learning culture remains a core task of L&D. Organizations need employees who take responsibility for their own development and can respond flexibly to new requirements. This requires L&D to design frameworks and formats in such a way that learning is experienced as a natural part of work.

Ensure long-lasting impact of L&D measures (21.8 %)

In tough economic times, the question of how much something contributes to business success becomes more important. L&D has to show that its offerings have a measurable impact on performance, change readiness, and strategic goals.

Low budget for L&D activities 19.3 %

Almost a fifth of respondents cite budget as the biggest challenge. In times of economic uncertainty, resources are scrutinized critically, even though employee development remains a key lever for success and future viability. For L&D, this means setting even clearer priorities and focusing scarce resources on strategically relevant topics.

Convince stakeholders of L&D measures 10.9 %

Around one in ten respondents see the biggest challenge as convincing key stakeholders – such as senior management or division heads – of the relevance of L&D. Under cost pressure and short-term priorities, L&D must clearly state its value, highlight its connection to strategic goals, and communicate its impact in a comprehensible way.

Supporting the organisation's future viability 18.5 %

L&D professionals see themselves as co-creators of corporate development. Future viability means building competencies for new business models, technologies, and ways of working, and supporting the organization through change. L&D can become a driving force by identifying skill requirements in collaboration with specialist departments and managers, developing these skills, and supporting change processes.

Improving employee performance 5.9 %

When the economic environment becomes more challenging, high-performing teams become even more important as a factor for success. L&D can provide support here by closely aligning development measures with role requirements and strengthening leaders in their role as performance and development partners.

L&D as partner

How does your L&D department support development within your organization in an increasingly volatile economic climate?

Building change competence & resilience
73

Internal communication of corporate goals & strategy
62

Skill analysis & planning
47

Measures to increase efficiency
41

Establishing scalable learning solutions
26

Strategic workforce & outplacement planning
6

responses

0   20   40   60   80

**Building change competence & resilience
(73 responses)**

By far the most frequently mentioned aspect highlights the role of L&D as a facilitator of change processes. In uncertain times, the main focus is on how well employees and leaders can cope with change. In practical terms, this means that employees and leaders need programs on change competence, resilience, communication in change processes, and leadership in uncertain times. In order to teach these skills in a practical way, L&D can link development programs specifically to real transformation projects. Toolkits for change communication, short, easily accessible learning activities (e.g., learning snacks, reflection questions, checklists), and regular learning and exchange formats further promote awareness.

Tip: To support organizations in building change competence in their teams, troodi offers suitable learning programs and customized Blended Learning Journeys. One example is the journey "Leading Change – Leading in Times of Uncertainty and Change," which is specifically aimed at leaders in change situations. Divided into four modules, the journey includes a balanced mix of learning programs, live-sessions, and social learning units. Contact us to find out more.

Internal communication of corporate goals & strategy
(62 responses)

More than half of respondents see L&D as playing a role in translating corporate strategy into everyday work. Learning opportunities and communication formats help to clarify goals and priorities and provide guidance, especially in uncertain times. Specifically, L&D can integrate strategic priorities into programs and mandatory formats, offer short explanatory sessions on strategy updates, and work with leaders to support the transfer of these concepts into practice. In this way, strategy is not only communicated but also conveyed in a practical manner.

Skill analysis and planning
(47 responses)

With skill analysis and planning, L&D lays the foundation for targeting people development at strategically relevant competencies. A lean competency model, initial pilot projects, assessments, and coordination with business units help to identify needs. Based on this, learning paths can be defined, training budgets prioritized, and skill development gradually integrated into existing HR processes.

Measures to increase efficiency
(41 responses)

Especially in economically challenging times, initiatives to increase efficiency can make a noticeable contribution to the more targeted use of resources. In practical terms, this means that L&D can work with business units to identify where friction losses occur in everyday work and develop targeted learning offerings and support formats to address them. These include short, problem-oriented learning modules, process training, and accompanying formats such as consultation hours or peer-learning, in which best practices are shared and further developed.

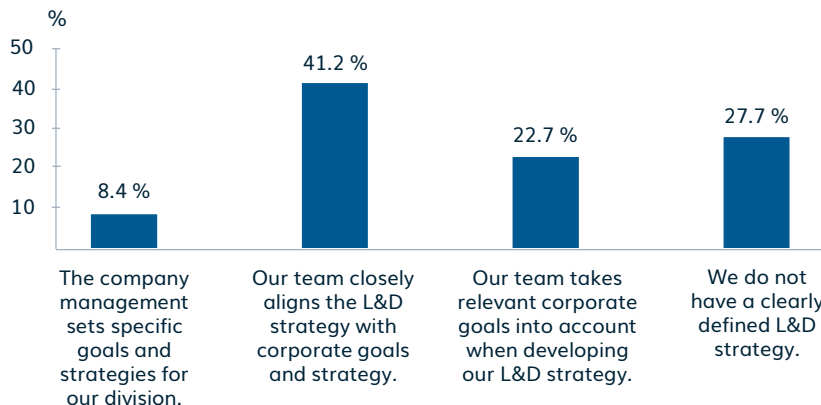**Establishing scalable learning solutions
(26 responses)**

Just under a quarter of respondents cite the development of scalable learning solutions as an important contribution of L&D. This scalability is a key lever for efficiently and consistently embedding critical skills throughout the company. In practice, this means developing modular programs that can be used flexibly across locations, roles, and languages. Core content can be delivered digitally and combined with local practical formats to create blended learning offerings. L&D can define consistent quality standards for this purpose.

**Strategic workforce & outplacement planning
(6 responses)**

A smaller group of respondents see their contribution in workforce and outplacement planning. Here, L&D is involved in sensitive transformation phases involving role changes, workforce restructuring, or location decisions. Specifically, L&D can work with HR and specialist departments to develop skill-based alternative paths for roles at risk, set up qualification programs for internal mobility, and support employees in their transition to new areas of responsibility (internal or external) – for example, through career workshops, coaching services, or outplacement support.

L&D strategy & company goals

To what extent is your L&D strategy linked to strategic corporate goals?

%

50	
40	
30	
20	
10	

8.4 % — The company management sets specific goals and strategies for our division.

41.2 % — Our team closely aligns the L&D strategy with corporate goals and strategy.

22.7 % — Our team takes relevant corporate goals into account when developing our L&D strategy.

27.7 % — We do not have a clearly defined L&D strategy.

In the majority of organizations (41.2 %), L&D is clearly integrated into strategic steering and can fulfill its role as a key partner in volatile times.

22.7 % of respondents take relevant corporate goals into account at least to some extent; there is potential here to strengthen the link and define priorities even more closely together with senior management. At the same time, just under a third (27.7 %) of respondents work in organizations without a clearly formulated L&D strategy. In these cases, the link to corporate strategy often remains vague, making it difficult to convincingly justify the contribution of L&D in economically difficult times. A further 8.4 % report that company management sets specific goals and strategies for the department. Although alignment with corporate strategy is particularly strong here, this also results in a more top-down approach: technical input, experience-based knowledge, and needs from the departments are less systematically incorporated into the objectives.

For the role of L&D as a strategic partner, this means that the more clearly corporate goals and L&D activities are linked and the more strongly both management perspectives and practical knowledge from the business units are incorporated, the more effectively L&D can fulfill its role as a strategic partner.

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Key topics & learning formats
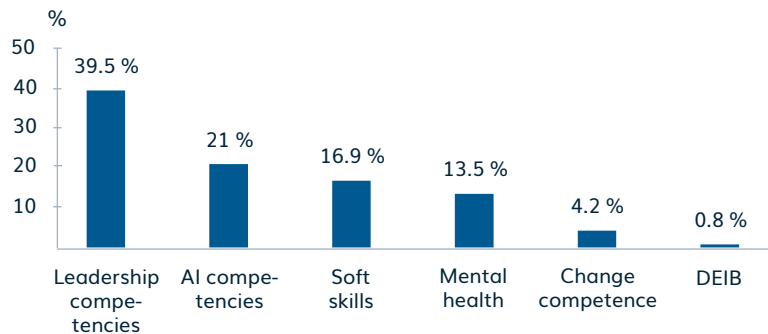
Leadership skills as a stable core (39.5 %)

Many organizations continue to invest in classic leadership topics – supplemented by aspects such as remote leadership, lateral leadership, and leadership in transformation. These priorities are directly linked to the challenges described in chapter 3 and to the development of change competence.

AI skills as a second focus area (21.0 %)

L&D faces the task of training employees and leaders so that they can use AI solutions effectively. This involves understanding the basics of AI and its possible applications on one hand and reflecting on how to use AI tools on the other. This is a key prerequisite for the strategic implementation of AI projects described in chapter 2.

Key topics 2026

Which topic has the highest priority in your organization in 2026?

%
50
40 39.5 %
30
20   21 %
10   16.9 %   13.5 %
                                  4.2 %   0.8 %

Leadership   AI compe-   Soft   Mental   Change   DEIB
compe-   tencies   skills health   competence
tencies

Soft skills and collaboration as a foundation   16.9 %

Soft skills – especially communication and collaboration – remain a key area of development for many organizations. In challenging times, there is an increased need for clear coordination, constructive conflict management, and efficient collaboration. Soft skills thus form the basis for effective leadership and for the use of new technologies and ways of working.

Mental health as part of sustainable development   4.2 %

Mental health is less frequently cited as the most important issue, but remains an important component of a sustainable L&D portfolio against the backdrop of high workloads and constant change. Programs for stress management, self-care, workload management, and coping with peak stress levels help to ensure long-term performance and health.

Focus on change competence   13.4 %

The explicit mention of change competence shows how strongly organizations are focusing on dealing with uncertainty and change. L&D can play a key role here by systematically preparing employees and leaders for change processes, creating spaces for reflection, and providing practical tools for dealing with dynamics and uncertainty.

DEIB and other topics   5 %

DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging) are only cited as a top priority by a small proportion of respondents. Under "Other," respondents cite more technical topics such as quality standards, sales and product training.

In 2026, L&D will focus strongly on leadership, AI skills, and the ability to deal with change – thus placing emphasis precisely on those areas where organizations face particular challenges in times of economic uncertainty.
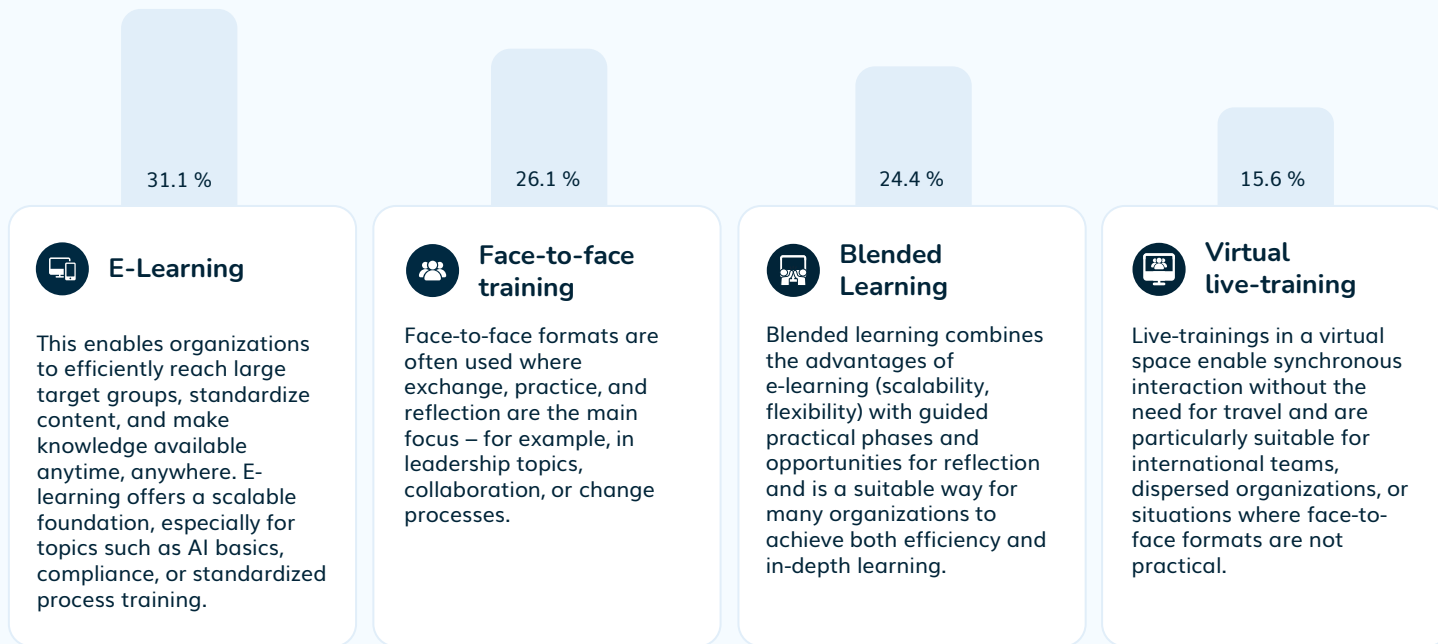
Learning formats

Which learning format will be used most frequently in your organization in 2026?

No single format dominates clearly. Instead, there is a clear mix of formats that reflects different needs and conditions. E-learning often forms the scalable basis, face-to-face and blended formats provide depth and transfer, and virtual live-training creates flexibility.

31.1 %

E-Learning

This enables organizations to efficiently reach large target groups, standardize content, and make knowledge available anytime, anywhere. E-learning offers a scalable foundation, especially for topics such as AI basics, compliance, or standardized process training.

26.1 %

Face-to-face training

Face-to-face formats are often used where exchange, practice, and reflection are the main focus – for example, in leadership topics, collaboration, or change processes.

24.4 %

Blended Learning

Blended learning combines the advantages of e-learning (scalability, flexibility) with guided practical phases and opportunities for reflection and is a suitable way for many organizations to achieve both efficiency and in-depth learning.

15.6 %

Virtual live-training

Live-trainings in a virtual space enable synchronous interaction without the need for travel and are particularly suitable for international teams, dispersed organizations, or situations where face-to-face formats are not practical.

Summary

Implications for L&D teams

Implications for L&D teams

L&D operates in a field of tension between technological dynamics, economic volatility, and high expectations for effectiveness. At the same time, it is clear that L&D teams today have key levers at their disposal to guide organizations through these times.

Focus on AI – but not at any price

AI-supported learning support and personalized learning paths are clearly at the forefront of perceived L&D trends in 2026. Other topics such as skill-based learning and self-learning culture remain important, but are taking a back seat to the focus on AI. For L&D, this means that AI can be a significant support, but it does not replace the fundamental building blocks of effective learning and development work.

AI in practice – the gap between expectations and integration

The integration of AI into L&D strategy has increased significantly compared to 2025, but often remains in the pilot and partial integration phase. Only a few organizations report having a comprehensively established AI strategy. This means that L&D needs to focus the use of AI in a targeted manner: with clearly defined use cases, a link to strategic goals, and a realistic assessment of the organizational requirements.

L&D as a partner for future viability and stability

The biggest challenges for L&D revolve around learning culture, effectiveness, budget, and supporting the future viability of the organization. At the same time, L&D is already making key contributions today: in building change competence and resilience, in translating corporate strategy into everyday work, and in skill analysis. The more closely these contributions are linked to the company's strategic goals, the more L&D will be perceived as an equal partner. A clearly formulated L&D strategy that is explicitly linked to corporate goals is an important anchor for this.

Intentionally coordinating content and formats

In terms of content, the focus is on leadership skills, AI skills, soft skills, and change competence. On the formal side, there is a deliberate mix of e-learning, face-to-face training, blended learning, and virtual formats. For L&D teams, this means that impact is created through the coordinated interaction of topics, target groups, and formats. Leadership and change require different learning spaces than the development of basic knowledge about AI or processes; therefore, consistent portfolio and format management is worth the effort.

L&D is a key lever for making organizations fit for the future in technologically and economically challenging times. Those who use AI with a sense of proportion, align their L&D strategy closely with corporate goals, and specifically develop a learning culture, change competence, and suitable learning formats not only strengthen the ability of employees to act, but also the resilience of the entire company. For L&D teams, this presents an opportunity to further sharpen their role as strategic partners and make their own contribution to corporate development visible.
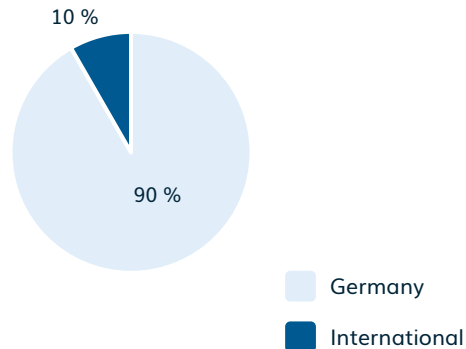
Sample group

A total of **119 people** took part in the survey for the L&D Trend Report 2026.

The results primarily reflect the perspectives of individuals who are directly involved in the design and management of learning and development in organizations. External perspectives from consulting, training, and coaching supplement this picture, but remain the minority. The results should primarily be interpreted in the context of the German-speaking market, with some international influences.

What is your role?

7 %
12 %
82 %

- Internal HRD / L&D team
- Other role
- External trainer / coach / consultant
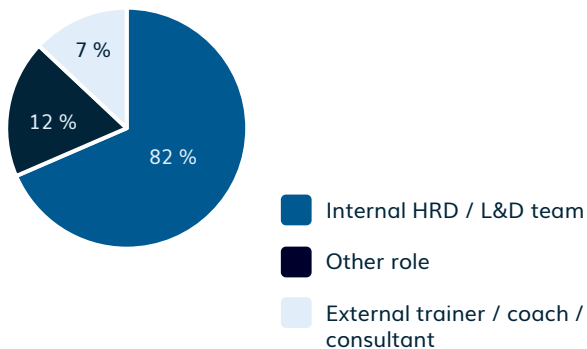
What region do you work in?

10 %
90 %

- Germany
- International

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About troodi

About troodi

Founded in January 2020 | 17 employees | Headquarters in Cologne | Network of over 40 trainers

Our goal is to enable personal and continuous development to ensure that organizations position themselves for long-term success. We develop training concepts that are effective, sustainable, practical, and tailored to our clients' challenges.

Modular learning architecture

We develop customized concepts – with our own learning platform, our own methodology, and our own trainers.

Partnership-based cooperation

As sparring partners, we work closely and strategically with our contacts in HR and people development.

Focus on measurable impact

We ensure transfer and effectiveness through clear learning objectives, accompanying evaluation, and relevant metrics.

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