



# WHAT IS A CONTENT LAB?

**Content Labs** bring together CEDEP's member companies and faculty to cover themes concerning business today. Invited participants are HRs and senior business leaders from the CEDEP member companies and ecosystem, who are assigned to work in groups and reflect on a series of topics.

In this report, we've condensed key insights from the 2022 Content Lab.

*Due to the open nature in which our member organizations collaborate—a feature unique to CEDEP—we've anonymized the names and affiliations of all participants.*



## THE 2022 CONTENT LAB

Moderated by Dr. Nick van Dam, an internationally recognized thought leader on corporate learning, the 2022 Content Lab took place on November 18 on our celebrated Fontainebleau campus.

The theme, “**The Learning Function for the Digital Age**,” invited participants to frame their reflections regarding a growing concern amongst organizations: as the digital becomes ubiquitous in the 21st century, what becomes of the role of learning? Do digital tools enhance learning within organizations or diminish it? What changes must L&D implement? The pandemic has, it goes without saying, forced us to reconsider the status quo of how L&D operates.

Senior L&D professionals engaged in two workshop activities. The first asked participants to reflect on **four L&D questions** formulated by Dr. van Dam around the importance of learning for business and employees. The second activity was structured around **five L&D challenges** drawn directly from our member and client organizations.

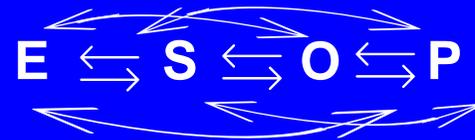
As participants deployed their collective intelligence, they also benefited from Dr. van Dam's deep expertise on the best practices and insights in the L&D industry.

Read more about Dr. Nick van Dam here: <https://www.cedep.fr/faculty-speaker/nick-van-dam/>



**E**NVIRONMENT  
**S**TRATEGY  
**O**RGANIZATION  
**P**EOPLE

At CEDEP, the **ESOP** model—Environment, Strategy, Organization, People—informs our approach to work. We strive to help member companies see how each component is intertwined.

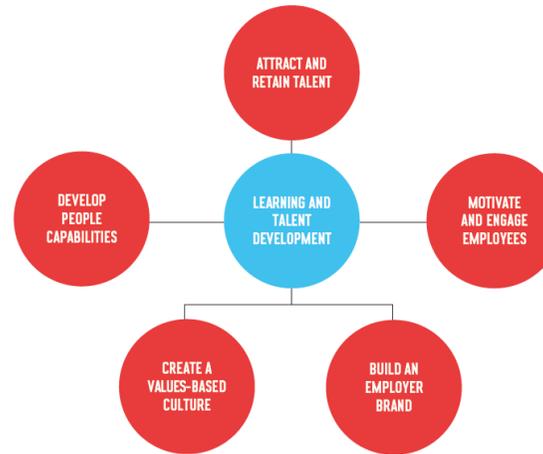


# HOW TO WIN SUPPORT FROM EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR “L&D AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT” PRIORITIES?

## MEASURING BUSINESS IMPACT

What are the costs to an organization if there are no learning programs at all? One way to get buy-in is via business cases linking behavioral changes directly to business impact. That said, there needs to be a shift in the conversation surrounding L&D: from being a cost center to a key player in value creation.

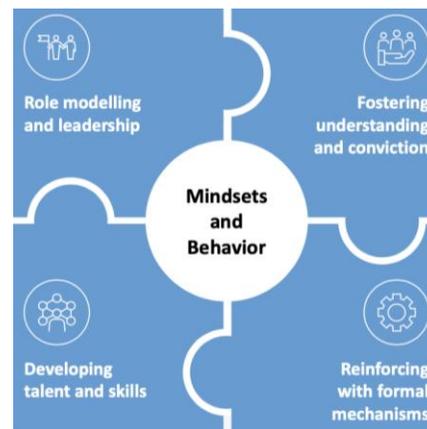
In an upcoming decade in which upskilling will be more pertinent than ever, Dr. van Dam urged us to rethink the strategic role of L&D. L&D not only develops and motivates employees, but it also helps an employer retain talent, build a brand, and create a values-based culture.



Source: Nick van Dam et al., *Elevating L&D*

## THE CEO

If we're out here trying to win support for leadership development, the best role model of a leader is likely, then, the CEO himself. Having a CEO buy-in is one thing, but what about the CEO as a mentor in L&D programs? As teacher or facilitator?



Source: Nick van Dam, *Content Lab Presentation at CEDEP, November 2022*

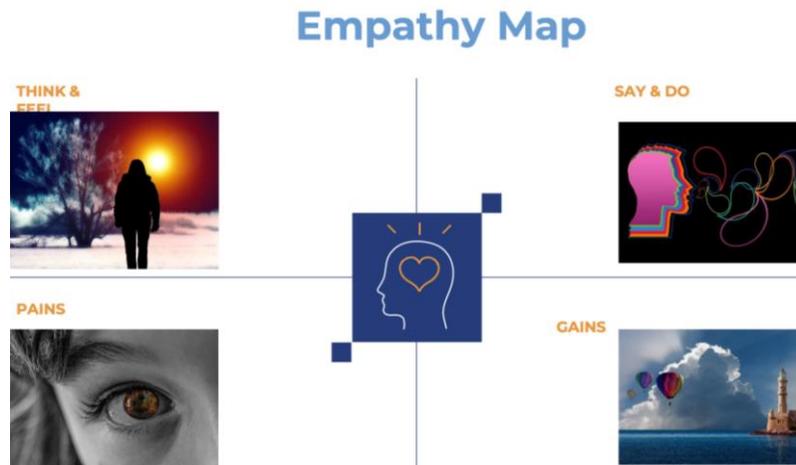


# HOW TO WIN SUPPORT FROM EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR “L&D AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT” PRIORITIES?

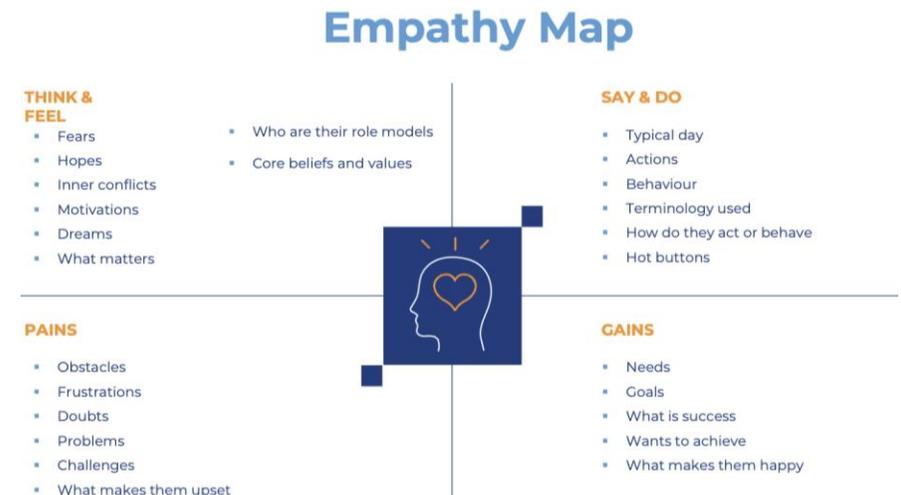
## HUMAN-CENTRICITY

There's a need to place the human at the center of discussions with executive leadership: a recurrent comment among participants was the people dimension of business. Promoting soft skills and an understanding of workers on an individual level were deemed critical. Maximizing your storytelling skills to communicate with senior leaders can help achieve buy-in.

In this respect, **empathy maps** could be a useful tool for mobilizing and inspiring stakeholders. Made up of four parts—think and feel, say and do, pains, and gains—empathy maps help L&D professionals chart the motivations and needs of employees.



Source: Nick van Dam, Content Lab Presentation at CEDEP, November 2022



Source: Nick van Dam, Content Lab Presentation at CEDEP, November 2022



# HOW TO CREATE A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING?

## WHAT ABOUT ME?

Trainings and programs should be personalized. It's that feeling of exclusivity that'll help convince employees to want to learn. This means not just having a portfolio of offerings catered to business needs, but to individual needs as well. In an economy in which jobs are becoming gigs, employees are looking for trainings that prepare them for a world outside of just their organization.

## BUILDING COMMUNITIES

A strong community can inspire employees to learn continuously. If the manager and the team are working together to upskill, what's at stake becomes clearer to both parties. Implementing communities based on different learning styles and organization roles can help facilitate social learning.

## LEARNING IN AND OUT OF WORK

Learning needs to be a seamless part of everyday life. It shouldn't just be a special event at work. Incorporating learning into every step of an employee's lifecycle in a company—from onboarding to offboarding—and providing opportunities for them to learn outside of work can help ingrain this mindset. Learning shouldn't just be because my company wants me to do it. It's because / want to do it when / want to do it.

The digital age has forced us to adapt our practices for building a continuous learning culture. Achieving a lifelong learning mindset will also involve taking advantage of digital learning solutions, artificial intelligence, and people data & analytics.



Source: Jan Rijken & Nick van Dam, 2021



Source: Nick van Dam, 2021



# HOW TO ENGAGE LEADERS TO PARTICIPATE IN DIGITAL/BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMS?

## THE VALUE OF DIGITALIZATION

We have to focus more on communicating the value of a digital/blended learning program. Sure, the content needs to address a real need amongst employees. But employees need to understand what's in it for them too.

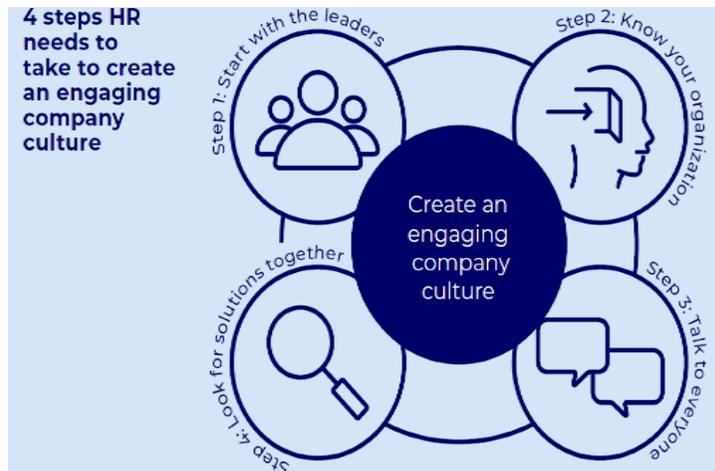
Key to getting buy-in is through a strategic alignment of L&D with business objectives. Demonstrating the effectiveness and efficiency of learning initiatives is vital; in the latter, cost-efficient delivery formats like digital learning are vital.

## WORKING ON DELIVERY

There's a stereotype that digital learning isn't engaging enough. But if done correctly, it can open up new avenues. L&D professionals can customize offerings for participants: e.g., a broader training could curate sessions for a target audience. A well-designed program with different formats e.g. (length, breakout rooms) and methods (peer coaching) could be thoroughly engaging.

## DIGITAL CHALLENGES

Participants were nonetheless compelled to highlight some inherent challenges. There's still difficulty in proving a ROI with digital learning. And then there are the usual symptoms noted amongst virtual learners: high attrition rates; lack of visibility of their program involvement for colleagues; low attention capacity; or even "Zoom" fatigue.



Source: Nick van Dam, "4 Steps HR Needs to Take" at IE Business School, March 2022



Source: Nick van Dam & Kate Coates, 2020



# HOW TO DO MORE WITH THE SAME BUDGET/RESOURCES?

## WHAT IS “MORE”?

How exactly do we define “more”? Participants noted that volume of learning and the value of learning are two separate things; and increasing volume doesn't necessarily lead to good results. Moreover, there might not be a need to reinvent the wheel with resources that already work.

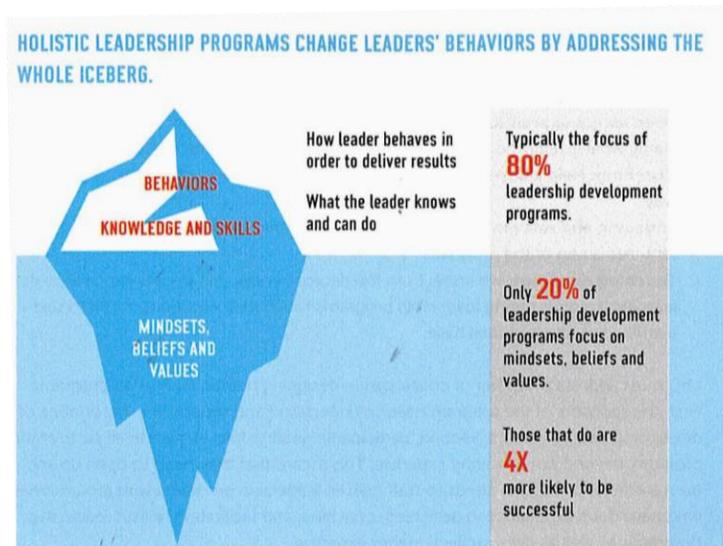
Dr. van Dam pointed out that organizations need to better allocate resources when devising a holistic leadership program. We need to address the whole “iceberg”: 80% organizations only focus on the behaviors required of a leader. It's what we expect to see from leaders. But only 20% of organizations focus on shifting their mindset, beliefs, and values—issues below the surface level that are fundamental to success.

## DIGITALIZATION

By providing trainings to large audiences regardless of location or time zone, digital learning may be the most cost-efficient option. Access to content at one's fingertips is a game changer. But you always have too much of a good thing. Too many LMS or digital tools can confuse learners and waste company resources. Streamlining learning technologies is therefore essential.

## WORKING TOGETHER

Working transversally—whether it be between teams within L&D or with different departments—can help us do more with less. Harmonizing curriculums and determining content overlap can help organizations better make use of their time when designing programs. It all starts with carefully reviewing your personal operating model (roles, priorities, time, energy spent).



Source: Jacqueline Brassey & Nick van Dam, 2018



## SKILLS FOR “NEW” LEADERS

There was debate on what exactly the “new” leader is. Has the conception of the leader changed that much over time? Certainly, some skills are more critical in today’s rapidly fluctuating world, but many have been perennial to leadership.

### THE ADAPTABLE LEADER

In a VUCA world, the “new” leader must be ready to face more disruptions than in the past. As the pandemic has taught us, leaders should be ready and open for change at a moment’s notice, whether that be in work habits or the digitalization of work. They should be ready to guide their organization through questions of DEI (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion) and sustainability.

### THE HUMAN LEADER

The soft skills behind leadership were the main source of consensus amongst participants. Leaders should be effective communicators with a strong sense of emotional intelligence. They should not be afraid to let themselves and others experience failure. Authenticity, courage, and vulnerability will allow them to inspire their fellow team members.



## BEST APPROACH OF DEVELOPMENT FOR EXECUTIVES

### MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

There needs to be a fit between business needs and the executives’ own expectations when devising a leadership development program. Getting executives to see how a program works with their ambitions plays a large role in boosting their engagement. But a program should also consider the expectations of stakeholders outside of the top brass: teams, partners, employees, clients, and the community.

### SELF-AWARENESS

A program that is personalized can help executives dig deeper and question their practices and methods at work. Punctuating the learning journey with “white spaces” and moments of silence can afford them precious moments of introspection.



## HOW TO SCALE “SOFT SKILLS” TRAINING?

### NOT SO “SOFT”

Soft skills need to be given the priority in leadership development. L&D professionals understood that “soft” skills aren’t exactly soft: in fact, they’re harder to master than so-called “hard” skills and are integral to business success. Alternatively terming them “power” skills might help with this shift in mindset.

### NEW TECHNOLOGY

New technology can expand access to soft skills training. For example, learners can, through the metaverse or Oculus headsets, roleplay within a simulated reality workplace. Tools for measuring one’s emotional responses or practicing social cues and body language are now within reach.

### RETHINKING TRAINING

Much of the conversation pondered the best methods for developing soft skills. Personalizing the training as much as possible was a recurrent theme, but participants also noted the need for: inspired speakers; storytelling; peer coaching; at least some in-person training. Rewarding good behaviors was also seen as an important step to reinforce learning.



## BEST LEARNING EXPERIENCE “IN-PERSON” (PHYSICAL CLASS)

### CREATING BONDS

The ideal “in-person” experience makes the most of having people gathered in one place: let’s work on bringing out the human connection amongst participants. Learning should be a holistic experience for the self: a physical class should instill a sense of belonging amongst participants by engaging the heart, body, and mind.

### THE “RIGHT” PROGRAM

For the learning experience to be fruitful, the “right” in-person program is dependent on numerous factors: the right facility, the right faculty, the right curriculum, and even the right participants. Fit is crucial. More often than not, they’ll be residential, intense, and personalized to some degree (e.g., one-on-one work, peer coaching).



# BEST PRACTICES FOR COACHING: IMPACT /SCALING/ INTERVENTIONS

## IS COACHING NECESSARY?

Are coaches truly that effective? Are we using them for the right reasons? And are they being overused? Coaching is not a “silver bullet” that can solve all problems; there’s no need to view the coach as a “guru” who can help us do it all. At the end of the day, you’ve got to face your problems by yourself.

## FINDING THE “RIGHT” COACH

If the problem can be solved with coaching, then there’s the question of finding the “right” coach. Coaches need to have gone through a robust process of accreditation and be able to adapt their approach to each employee. Coaching over a long period can be deemed ideal, but attention must be paid to whether the impact is worth the investment.

# THANK YOU

We’d like to thank the representatives of our member companies and the CEDEP ecosystem for participating in the 2022 Content Lab, which proved to be a rich and stimulating experience in collaboration. What stood out in our reflections was the need for L&D to continue fostering human connections: digital or not, learning needs to speak to employees on an individual level. Whether programs be digital or not, L&D professionals maintain a central role in tying individual interests to business needs. It’s all about finding the right “fit.” And in a fluctuating world where disruptions are an everyday reality, we’re still trying to figure out how to adapt and make it “right” for us.

Those wanting further insights might refer to Dr. van Dam and Jan Rijken’s *49 Tools for Learning and Development*, provided to all attendees. But above all, we urge participants to keep working together in defining the future of L&D. We invite everyone to stay in touch with CEDEP and each another.

It’s thanks to the digital that we’re able to continue the CEDEP experience beyond our campus. The Content Lab itself can be thought of as a continuous learning journey, bolstered by the digital, as we look forward our 2023 Lab event.

For more information, please contact:

Jason Hong, [jason.hong@cedep.fr](mailto:jason.hong@cedep.fr)

Muriel Larvaron, [muriel.larvaron@cedep.fr](mailto:muriel.larvaron@cedep.fr)



# CEDEP IS A GLOBAL, EXECUTIVE EDUCATION CLUB, WHERE MINDS MEET, GROW AND SUCCEED TOGETHER.

We are a unique, well-established close and collaborative learning community of international members from diverse and noncompetitive industries. Our members understand the value of building long-term relationships, active participation, open exchange and leveraging our collective intelligence.

We are rooted in the real world and driven by the real-life challenges of our community.

We go further and dive deeper than a traditional business school, which leads to innovative, highly relevant and actionable learning.

Our independence means we are free to bring together experts and faculty from many of the world's top business schools and our extensive network of learning partners to work with our members.

We co-create highly-personalised custom programmes and open multi-company programmes focus on leadership development in small, dynamic and highly participative groups which can be delivered in person, online or as a blend of both.

We always challenge conventions and assumptions. We inspire new and empowering thinking from the inside out building internal capacity and ownership.

We are co-run by our member companies who believe in a humanist philosophy and approach. We focus on long term and lasting organisational development.

We are based in the Fontainebleau forest and share a campus and origins with INSEAD. We were created 50 years ago by pioneering entrepreneurs as the first membership organisation dedicated to executive education. We are now an independent, not-for-profit club with over 20 international members such as L'Oreal, Renault and Tata Steel.

In an ever changing and uncertain world we choose to work together to make the world a better place for us all.

Together, we are better.  
Together, we are stronger.  
Together, we are CEDEP.



CEDEP  
Bd de Constance  
77305 Fontainebleau Cedex  
France  
[info@cedep.fr](mailto:info@cedep.fr)

